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SEIZING A MUSKET FROM THE DECK-RACK, NANCY STRUCK HIM A BLOW UPON THE
HEAD WHICH RENDERED HIM SENSELESS.

Old Nancy's Ward;

OR,

THE RUSTIC RIFLE RANGERS.

BY LIEUT. COL. HAZELTINE,
AUTHOR OF "THE MARKED MINER," "THE
SILVER BUGLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

NEW YEAR AT VALLEY FORGE.

PERHAPS there was no period in the history of the American Revolution where the prospects of the patriots were so gloomy as during the winter of '77, when the army of Washington was in camp at Valley Forge. This was a strong position upon the south bank of the Schuylkill River, about twenty miles above the city of Philadelphia, then held by the British forces under Lord Howe.

It was a heart-rending picture—that of the patriot camp. The snow covered the ground to a great depth, and in places was so drifted that the roads were almost impassable. Whenever a movement of any kind was made, the blood-marks were left behind, from the frozen, shoeless feet of the sufferers. There was a great scarcity of clothing of every description, and of blankets, and many a bitter night was passed in a sleepless manner, while the benumbed soldier crept closely to the camp-fire. And provisions were equally scarce. Sickness prevailed to a fearful extent; but, in spite of all this, those brave men could not be turned aside from their purpose.

It was the first of January. Around a pile of blazing logs were seated a dozen men. It was some distance from the main camp, and appeared to be a "picket-post." Twilight was just merging into darkness. The soldiers were preparing their supper. Their fare certainly was an unusual one. Upon a large plank, which formed the table, was smoking half a dozen chickens, and a young "shote" was roasting before the fire. A half-dozen suspicious-looking bottles were upon the extemporized table.

Prominent among those present were two females. One of them was a young lady, apparently not more than seventeen or eighteen years of age. Her dress bespoke a person of the better class. The other was a woman who had passed the meridian of life. From the strong resemblance between the females, one would have at once decided them to be mother and daughter.

The arrangements for the supper were now complete, and one of the party exclaimed:

"Come, Mrs. Meredith, you and your daughter be seated. Our New Year's feast is a glorious one, and more especially so, as it is enlivened by the presence of those to whom we owe so much."

"Shall we not wait until our friends join us?" asked the lady who had been addressed as Mrs. Meredith.

"We will not have long to wait. The flavor of such a feast has probably reached them in

advance of the messenger, or else he has been upon a double-quick all of the way."

"And if he has, I tell you, Ned Barton, that such a prospect would give a man courage to double-quick to Philadelphia and back, in spite of the snow."

"You are right there, Harvey Osgood. But, hurrah, here they come. So sit down—sit down, and may it be a feast of reason and a flow of soul, as well."

Another party, of at least a dozen men, came up at the moment. They broke into a hearty cheer, and then commenced the feast.

"But where is old Bearclaw?" asked one of the party.

"Look here, chuckle-head Dan, don't you call old Zeke Hunter by that name again; because I won't stand it."

"You won't stand it. Then why do you call me names?"

"Because you are always finding fault with somebody. Now, Dan Disbrow, I don't mean to impugn your character, because you are brave in a fight, and Washington puts great trust in you. You got that ugly banging by the Britishers; and, although it makes you look more like the Old Scratch than any thing white, yet we all honor you for it. But, don't twit about other folks being deformed. Here comes the chief of the Schuylkill Rangers. All honor to Zeke the brave!"

The person addressed came forward, and was received with a hearty cheer.

"Thank ye—thank ye, friends," he said, as he gazed around him.

There was little remarkable about the appearance of Zeke Hunter. He was but little above five feet in height, and quite thick-set. His hair was an iron-gray, showing his age to be about fifty years. His dress was of very coarse material, and like that worn by the common citizen of that date. But one would have been struck by the fact, that when surrounded by friends on all sides, eager to shake him by the hand, he always extended his *left* arm, and never his right. The fact was, that his right hand had been severed from his arm, and that, in its place, was an *iron hook*, which he used as a substitute. The hand had been shot away upon the spot where the first American blood was spilt—*Lexington!* But, as Zeke was acting constantly in the capacity of scout, he never wore the Continental uniform. It was on account of this iron hand or hook, that some of the lads had dubbed him "Bearclaw," but it was always spoken more as a *familiar* title than as an insulting nickname; for Zeke was an immense favorite with all, and much valued by the commander-in-chief.

Dan Disbrow, the person who had been reproved by Barton for using that term, was also a man much respected by his comrades and officers. But he was a surly fellow, and this was his *only* bad trait. He would growl and fret at every thing, but he didn't want anybody else to do it. He had often been seen to step into the hospitals and give his ration to some wounded comrade, which he perhaps ought to have reserved for his own use; and the best of this was the fact, that he always endeavored to conceal the act, or any act which would reflect upon him.

like credit. He was good and kind, and as tender-hearted as a woman, in spite of himself!

Dan was badly disfigured. He had lost an eye; his jaw had been broken by a shot, so that one side of it hung down, giving him the appearance of gaping with *half* his mouth; and there was a huge gash or scar across his cheek. He arose as Zeke came up, and each greeted the other warmly.

"Come, now," cried a dozen voices, "tell us all about it, Zeke."

"It's the same old story," answered the Continental ranger. "Captured a British foraging party, and so brought in a few chickens and turkeys, and about fifty cattle; just enough to give the boys their New Year's treat, which they have so well earned. I only wish 'em to enjoy it, and thank no one but our patriotism for it!"

"Good! good!" cried the party.

"I say it ain't good!" growled Dan, who seemed disposed to resent his chief's course in the matter.

"What do you mean?" asked one of the party, rather peremptorily. "Can't the chief do anything to please you?"

"Where did you take that dozen fat fellows which I saw on your shoulder an hour ago, as you were going toward camp?" asked Dan, of the one-hand ranger, without heeding the question of the previous speaker.

"Wal, Dan," replied Zeke, "ef it'll do you any *particular* good to know, I'll tell you: I was a-takin' on 'em down to the general and his staff."

"And did Washington take 'em?"

"I see what ye're drivin' at, Dan; so I'll satisfy ye. The general thanked me for my thought of him, but told me to take 'em up to the hospitals for the sick."

"I knew that would be just what he would say! And that's just what we ought to do with ours, boys. Beef ain't so good for sick folks as turkeys and chickens. I say it looks dod-rotted mean for us to be feasting here like kings, while our general is denying himself."

"But I tell you, Dan, that I did not take the turkeys up to the hospitals, and the general and his officers are now having a jolly time over them," persisted the ranger.

"Look here, Zeke Hunter, don't you slander Washington," added Dan, somewhat in real anger. "I am one of your men for anything that's got duty and fight in it, but I won't hear even my captain slander the leader of our armies."

"Oh! don't be too cranky and I'll tell ye all about it. Well, the *sick* boys have all got fowls enough to last them two or three days, and the well 'uns in camp will have lots of beef-soup, steaks, roasts and boils."

"Where did they all come from?" asked a dozen eager and excited men.

"Mrs. Meredith and her daughter, Laura, brought a large number of them."

Three rousing cheers were given, to which the lady replied:

"And, knowing that Mr. Hunter had captured as many more, and that all the sick would be supplied, I thought it nothing more than fair that those exposed on the bleak outer picket-

line, should, for once, enjoy a luxury. Since my son, Frank, is here with you, of course I prefer to remain. You have made this place very comfortable. This wall of brush which surrounds us, breaks the wind, and the blazing fire renders it quite cosy. I shall greatly enjoy the day with you brave fellows, with your permission."

Frank Meredith, a young man, or rather a boy, of nineteen, was seated between his mother and sister. He had not participated in the conversation, but appeared very much gratified with the feast, and the presence of his friends. Frank had entered the army at the commencement of hostilities, and had been a true and faithful soldier. But this was the first time he had met his mother and sister since he left them for the battle-field. Mrs. Meredith was a widow, and resided in Philadelphia, with her daughter Laura. She possessed considerable means, and was constantly doing something for the patriot soldiers.

As the New Year approached, she had determined to see her son, and that the "boys" should have a feast at Valley Forge. The fair Laura had insisted upon accompanying her mother, no matter what might be the danger or exposure. The cause of this determination on the part of the young lady might be partially explained by a remark of Dan's, in reply to a remark of Mrs. Meredith, that she preferred to remain at the picket-post, because her son was present. Dan remarked, in an undertone, sufficiently loud to be heard by the ladies:

"Yes; and I guess that pretty daughter of yours prefers to remain here, because somebody else is present."

Laura blushed.

"Oh! you needn't look so abashed. Lieutenant Harvey Osgood ain't the man for any one to be ashamed of," added Dan, while Osgood, in turn, showed signs of a lover's discomposure.

"Come, come, Dan," answered the lieutenant, "no personal allusions, if you please."

"No? You know very well you *like* it."

"Mrs. Meredith," continued Osgood, "will you give us an account of your adventure of coming hither? It must have been a dangerous undertaking."

"Certainly. It was fraught with some danger, and I have no doubt but we have been detected. If so, it is likely I shall not return to Philadelphia very soon. But I ought to be content in a camp where so many of our brave defenders remain unmurmuringly."

"It will be but a sorry home, Mrs. Meredith. But why do you think you have been discovered?"

"I will explain. I resolved, two weeks since, to visit the camp to-day, and I determined to bring food. I felt sure that I had been watched and that I could not secure either medicines or blankets in future. This was confirmed when, upon making application for some articles, I was refused and followed to my home. Once under the ban of suspicion in that city, which is governed by a tyrant, the situation of an unprotected person would be a trying one, at best. I half-resolved to seek protection at some distant farm-house, but *fully* resolved to visit this camp. And, also, that I would not come empty-handed. So I

started Mr. Hunter, who was then in the city, across the Schuylkill, for the purchase of fowls. He worked faithfully among the farmers, and, after a time, he had a goodly number concealed beneath the snow, at a safe distance from Philadelphia. This done, he returned to camp for a conveyance.

"I left the city with my daughter, for the purpose of joining Mr. Hunter at the proper place, but I saw that we were followed by a number of horsemen. They kept at a distance, and were evidently endeavoring to avoid observation. On my arrival at the appointed place, I found Mr. Hunter and a dozen horsemen of the patriot army. The packs were loaded, and ready for a start. But the enemy were advancing upon us, although our numbers were concealed from them by the wood. Here Mr. Hunter brought his strategy to bear, and will explain for himself."

"Go on, Zeke," cried his friend. "Hurrah for the ranger!"

"Wal, boys, you see, the fact of the matter is this: When I saw the Britishers coming toward us, I knew we couldn't fight so many, and I was bound to save the chickens."

"Good for you!"

"Don't interrupt me. Wal, I advised our boys to make tracks, fast as possible, and then I started back to meet the soldiers. I met them, and told a whopping big lie."

"Ha! ha! You and your braves are equal to any occasion! What was your lie, captain?"

"I said that a hundred of Washington's men were concealed in the woods, and they believed it. They had seen me a great deal in Philadelphia, and didn't have any suspicion of me, because they thought I worked on old Bill Miller's farm, just over the river. They were about to return to the city, when a red-coat rode up. He had been back in the country. He said that twenty of his fellows had a fine drove of cattle about a mile back, and were bringing them into the city."

"Jehosaphat!" says I, "I'll bet that's just what them *rebels* are scoutin' around here for. Jist keep yer eyes skinned, Britishers, if yer don't want the starvin' Yankees arter ye like a pack of wolves!"

"They will seize the cattle," said the British.

"Why, there is twenty of you here," said I, "and, with the twenty that are with the drove, you ought to be able to lick a hundred hungry Yankees, as lean as rails, and as full of splinters."

"But," said the captain, "the men that are with the cattle are only teamsters, and would run at the very sight of a rebel."

"Wal, boys, a thought struck me. I wanted to get the biggest part of the Britishers back in the city. But, I was bound to have *them cattle*! I knew it would take them two hours to get to headquarters and back again, with reinforcements, and so I made up my mind I'd have them cattle. And so says I:

"What! The rebels have them cattle! No! not by a darn sight, if you will trust to me. I don't perpose to give the Connecticut clam-eaters an' Massachusetts coddies a taste o' that drove."

"What do you mean?" asked the Britishers.

"I mean to have them cattle," says I, "an' don't mean to let the New England ragamuffins fill their jackets with good beef."

"How are you going to do it?" says he.

"Jest as easy as settin' fire to a straw-stack," says I. "You just send one of your men like split back to the colonel, or some other hossifer, and bring down men enough to lick them fellers. I will go with you and meet the drove, and you can turn them into my barn-yard till the soldiers come up. Perhaps the Yankees won't find them in the mean time." Wal, you see, they was about to start off the messenger, when I jumped up, and says I:

"Just look down there! Jehosaphat! but they is hungry cusses!"

"Where?" asked the soldier. "What do you see?"

"Down tew the river, forninst the city. Don't you see?"

"I don't see anything," said the Britisher, with considerable sharpness.

"You didn't look quick enough. They've hid now. Jest like wolves, sir, an' as hungry lookin' as an empty meat bar'l."

"Explain yourself, you clodhopper!" shouted the Britisher, fiercely, over me.

"Wal," said I, "if I didn't see at least a dozen rebels skulking along behind that snow-pile, then I hope King George may spit me for a broil, or a stew, or a fry, or anything else that he likes."

"Do you think there was a dozen?" asked the Britisher.

"I couldn't tell, exactly; but I shouldn't wonder if there was more. They're always sneakin' around, and the deuce of it is, you never know where to find 'em—jest as in a trade, when you think you've got 'em, you haven't got 'em, any more'n I got a jew's-harp."

"That's true," says he. "Boys, we must cut our way through those fellows, or we will be taken prisoners. I've felt all along that we should have to show fight on this cruise, and now it's come, if we don't escape."

"They were about to start off. Of course, I knew there wasn't anybody there to oppose them, but I wanted to get 'em scared, for I *was bound to have them cattle*! I knew the drovers wouldn't believe me, and turn the cattle into Bill Miller's yard. So I said to the officer, as he was about to scoot, like a rabbit what smelled dog:

"But you must let *one* man go with me, or your drovers won't believe what I say 'bout the cattle, and they'll, maybe, be all-fired fools enough to keep right on the road, until the Yankees gobble 'em all up."

"That's true," said the captain. And then he detailed a man to go with me, giving him orders to follow my bidding, while the others started toward the city. Then I off with my man in double-quick, I tell ye. I soon met the drove, and, in a few minutes, we got them all safe in the yard. They were a fine-looking lot, and then I made up my mind I *would* have 'em, or bu'st my repotation for a ranger. I found out that every one of 'em had been paid for with British gold, and then I *swore* I'd have 'em. So I told the drovers about the hundred men, who were concealed in the woods, watching for them,

My eyes, but the fellows were scared! They trembled, and looked as pale as Polly Tompkins, when she got into a grave by mistake. I knew there was no time to lose, if I was going to get them cattle, and so, all at once, I jumped up, and run like a feller with the wu'st kind' o' colic, crying out:

"There they come—there they come! Make yourselves sceerce!"

"Wal, in about two shakes of a lamb's tail, they were all after me, like a mice in the oat-bin, when the cat sticks his head in the door. But, Lord, I couldn't begin to keep up with them—of course not. Their coat-tails cracked behind 'em like seed in a gourd. Jehosaphat! how they did scoot!"

"Of course they did," cried the party. "But what next?"

"Wal, I went just as straight as a flea gittin' down a dog's hind-leg, back to the yard. Old Miller got up his team in a jiffy. I tell you, boys, he's true blue. Then we loaded up the chickens, turkeys, and little pigs, which had been left behind, and started for camp. I took charge of the cattle, and, with the help of Mother Miller and her boy, succeeded in getting the most of them here."

"Well, you are a boss, Captain Hunter, an' no mistake. I knocks under to you," said Dan. "But where is Miller, his wife and boy?"

"They are in camp, I s'pose, 'kase it won't do for 'em to go home jest yet."

"And it is all up with you, so far as your rangin' into Philadelphia is concerned."

"Why so?"

"Because the cheat will be detected, and you would be seized the first time the enemy lays hands onto you."

"Yes, no doubt—when they lays hands onto me."

"Hark!" exclaimed Lieutenant Osgood, as he sprung to his feet. "There is a shot. Perhaps the red-coats have followed after."

"They have!" yelled a voice close by the side of them.

"Quick, men, we are surprised!" cried the lieutenant.

In an instant the party sprung for their guns. But it was too late. The surprise was complete. Osgood, who was the officer in command of the picket in that direction, and was responsible for their vigilance, felt the full force of the position into which he had brought himself on account of that responsibility, and was not inclined to yield readily. Yet, although he fought bravely, it was of no avail. He was quickly felled to the earth, senseless.

When he recovered, he judged, by the smoldering embers and the position of the stars, that it must be near morning. He was alone. He could only conjecture that his friends had all been captured, as none were dead near him. Mrs. Meredith and her daughter were nowhere to be found. All inquiry in the camp failed to elicit any information with regard to them, or any of his comrades. He was compelled to report particulars to headquarters. It was with an aching heart that he did so, for he knew that neglect of duty on the picket-line was punishable with death. He gave the details, and was placed under arrest.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE BAN.

THE situation of Lieutenant Osgood was a trying one, but not until he had reflected upon it for some time, did he *fully* realize it. His wound was not serious, having been given by a blow from a musket, rendering him insensible for a time. He had taken the responsibility of withdrawing all the guard to the picket-post, for the purpose of participating in the feast. Their "beat" was at least half a mile beyond the post-fire, and, had they remained as they should have done according to military law, the alarm would have been given at the approach of the British soldiers, taken up by the "post" and spread from thence to camp, and so all serious consequences would have been avoided. But the British had never before ventured so near Valley Forge, and he did not for a moment apprehend danger. While thus reflecting over the affair, he was waited upon by a file of soldiers, who conveyed him to headquarters. The commander-in-chief was present.

A flush overspread his face as the prisoner entered, which did not produce any very good impression in his favor. No one requested the prisoner to sit, and he remained standing, while an awkward silence prevailed. At length it was broken by one of the general's staff, asking:

"Lieutenant Harvey Osgood, were you officer of the outer picket-guard last night?"

"I was, major."

"Are you acquainted with the articles of war concerning the duties of such a position?"

"I believe I am."

"Thoroughly?"

"I think so."

"Are you aware that it is death for a soldier to leave his post when on picket duty, without being properly relieved?"

"I am."

"Did you not call in every man last night?"

"I did."

"Had you any authority from one higher in rank than yourself to do it?"

"I believe I had."

"State by whom this authority was given."

"It was given by the commander-in-chief."

Washington had been resting his head upon a small table over which he leaned. Upon hearing this assertion, he raised himself and cast upon the prisoner a searching look, exclaiming:

"By me, sir!"

"No, general; but by order of the commander-in-chief above us all," pointing upward as he spoke.

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you, general. You know how we have all suffered for food during the past month. You know that yesterday the boys, who never before murmured, and have been faithful in everything, were driven by the pangs of hunger to make an attack upon the commissary department, and would have eaten in an hour that which was designed to last another week, or until further supplies could be received. They were only prevented from doing so through the influence of their officers."

"Just before the dusk of evening yesterday, I prepared my guard-relief of six men. The first relief entered upon their duties at four o'clock,

At six they were to be relieved, again to go on post at ten, remaining until twelve, and again at four remaining until six in the morning. For six long hours during the bitter night, they must stand upon the bleak hill, shivering in the blast. They did not utter one word of complaint as they left the comparatively comfortable shelter, and as I gazed upon their pale faces and emaciated forms, their tattered garments and almost shoeless feet, my heart bled for them. I *knew* they were hungry—*very* hungry, for I was so myself.

"Well, general, they had not been gone half an hour, when the food and the liquors, which Mrs. Meredith had so kindly furnished us, were brought in. I don't wonder that it almost made them mad, for I became nearly so myself. And when I learned that we were not the only favored ones, I believe I cried for joy. General, you know what the feeling is, when a man is almost starving, to *smell* the savor of luxuries such as we were blessed with last night. It did not appear to me as if I possibly *could* wait an hour, or even until the preparations for the feast were made. And then I thought of the poor boys on guard. Why should *they* be compelled to wait? They had but half an hour more to stand. They might be relieved *then* and partake of the luxuries *with* us. I did not apprehend the slightest danger at all, and certainly not merely from the withdrawal of the outer line for a single half-hour. These were thoughts which crossed my mind; but they were only momentary, for I acted as my *heart*, and not my judgment or strict military law might dictate, and I sent for the boys to join us at the feast."

"But, you see the consequence of that breach of discipline?"

"I do; and most sincerely regret it."

"You know the penalty is death to you, and *not* the soldiers. Although they were not properly relieved, yet it was by your order, and upon you must rest the responsibility."

"I am willing to take, general. If I am to die, I don't know but I am fully repaid by the pleasure of that moment. My greatest grief will be to find out that, through my thoughtlessness, harm has come to any of my friends. Have you learned anything of them?"

"Not one word. It is likely the entire party were captured. But there are other questions it becomes necessary to ask. Did you not pass beyond the picket-line the day before yesterday?"

"I did, sir."

"What was your motive in doing this?"

"It is one I can not explain."

"Indeed! That appears a little strange."

"An explanation would satisfy you; but, as the subject is a delicate one, I prefer not to give it, lest I be thought foolish."

"You met a horseman at that time, did you not?"

"I did, sir."

"Was it not a British officer?"

"Not that I am aware of. His dress was that of a common farmer."

"Did he address you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He made some inquiries about the camp."

"What did you answer him?"

"I have forgotten. Certainly nothing that would have been out of place, even if he *had* been a British officer in disguise."

"Did you not hand him a letter?"

"No, sir; I did not hand him a letter."

"Do you know this man?" The questioner pointed to a cadaverous-looking person who was seated in one corner of the tent.

"I do not," replied Osgood. "I never before saw him, I am certain."

"He states that he was near you when you met the horseman on the hill, and that he heard you plot for the betrayal of the picket-guard to the enemy, and that you gave the person a paper which contained the exact situation of our camp, and other important information."

"Who is this man?" asked Osgood, indignation flashing in his face.

"His name is Philip Johnson."

"Then Philip Johnson is a liar and a villain—the hired tool of some designing scoundrel, either in or out of the army."

"He is one of my scouts, and appears to be a faithful one. I have not yet had reason to doubt his integrity or his loyalty."

"But I tell you, general, he speaks falsely, and I beg, no matter what my punishment may be for neglect of duty, that you will *not* believe me false to my country and my God. Think of my past services, and tell me what act of mine could cast even a shadow of suspicion upon my truth. But I scorn to beg the question. I am so far above the aspersion of treason as to be ashamed to think of it."

"I have always considered you faithful, and hope yet to find you so. But, will you explain *why* you went to the brow of yonder hill?"

"I will. But first permit me to ask why this man did not report the occurrence to you *at once*? It was the day before yesterday that I met the stranger on the hill."

"Why did you delay your report, Mr. Johnson?" asked the general.

The fellow, thus addressed, arose to his feet, made an awkward salute, and, after considerable hesitation, said:

"Ye see, gin'ral, I didn't think the feller was goin' to do the thing up quite so quick, an' I wanted to wait to git more ag'in' him."

"It was wrong. Well, lieutenant, now for your explanation."

"General, you shall have it. I don't know that I need to blush at my reason. There resides in Philadelphia one whom I love. She is my affianced wife. And if I can not see her—such were my feelings before she came here—I can at least look upon the city she makes her home. So I have frequently been to the top of the hill, for, from that point I can see the spires of Philadelphia. It affords me a kind of satisfaction to do so."

"Have you been to the city recently?"

"I have not."

"But Mr. Johnson affirms that he saw you there, and that you were in conversation with our enemies."

"Were those enemies male or female?" asked Osgood.

"Which were they, Johnson?"

"Both," was the reply.

"Why did you not report the fact at once, Johnson?" asked Osgood.

"I only recognized you day before yesterday as being the same man," answered Johnson.

"Lieutenant Osgood, you received permission to be absent from camp on two different occasions. How long at each of these stated times were you away?"

"The first, one day and night; the second, two days and nights."

"Did you visit Philadelphia on either of these occasions?"

"I did not. It was my purpose to do so if possible, but I found it too great a venture to attempt to cross the river."

"Where did you remain during that absence?"

"Every night at the house of William Miller, a truer man than whom never lived. He is in camp now, or at least *was* last night, and can verify my words."

"What was your motive in visiting Philadelphia?"

"To visit one whom I love and by whom I am loved—the daughter of a Mrs. Meredith. Is it likely that Laura Meredith would love a traitor? You know what the mother has done for our poor boys. And is it likely that I would select the night that they were with me for the surrendering of my guard? But I will speak no more upon that subject. To argue upon it would be to admit, upon my part, the possibility of a doubt. I have no fears that any who know me will think me disloyal. As for the punishment for my neglect, I will meet it like a man, and yet I regret that it is necessary to inflict any. First, because my poor, bleeding country will lose one who is true in heart, and she needs every arm; and, in the second place, I would like to put forth every effort to find those who have captured our friends."

"Lieutenant, you have the sympathy of all present, and I do not think you are a traitor or that you intentionally did a wrong. You may still consider yourself under arrest, but you can go to your own quarters; there shall be no restraint upon you."

Osgood returned to his tent with a heavy heart. He did not fear being deemed a traitor; neither had he any great anxiety with regard to the result of his trial for neglect of duty. But he suffered the most intense agony when he reviewed the situation of his friends. If Mrs. Meredith was in the hands of the British, she would undoubtedly be tried and condemned as a spy; or, at least, she would be charged with giving "aid and comfort to the enemy."

He determined to await with patience the hour of his release, then to ascertain the situation of his friends, and to make every effort for their benefit. One comfort presented itself. The rangers were absent, and if they had not been captured, would probably bring in information of the captives; or, if they were prisoners, their enemies never could hold such spirits long in bond, and they doubtless would, ere many mays, "turn up" with good news.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN'S PROGRAMME.

A PARTY of two hundred British dragoons

were detailed to cross the Schuylkill and attack the supposed Yankee hundred, and to bring in the drove of cattle. It was important that this should be done, for Howe was in no very pleasant situation with regard to supplies, and the cattle were choice beeves which the British commissariat had long been looking for.

The soldiers advanced cautiously, expecting every moment to receive a volley of Yankee lead. At length they saw the panic-stricken teamsters, who came tearing through the snow toward them. Of course a halt was made. As the frightened men came up, the commander of the cavalry asked:

"What is the matter, men?"

"Why, captain," replied one of the party, trembling, "there are at least five hundred of them!"

"Five hundred of whom?"

"The Yankees, you know."

"Where?"

"About a mile back on the hill, if they ar'n't after us now."

"Did you see them?"

"No, but—"

"Who saw the rebels?" cried the captain, in a rage.

The frightened skedaddlers began to look one upon the other, as if each expected his fellow to speak. But all were silent.

"Who saw any of the Yankee troops?" yelled the captain, now thoroughly in a rage.

"The one who gave the alarm was the man who came back in company with me, for the purpose of turning the cattle into his barnyard until assistance would arrive."

These words were spoken by the soldier who had been detached from the first small squad to accompany Zeke, while the others returned to Philadelphia for help.

"What was the name of the fellow?" demanded the captain.

"He called himself Miller, I think. At all events, when the cattle were turned into the yard, he spoke of the place as *his* farm."

"Was he an old white-haired man?"

"No; his hair was a kind of rough iron-gray. He had lost a hand, and in its place was an iron hook."

"I have seen that fellow in the city," said the captain, "and I believe he is a Yankee spy. You have been deceived, and have, coward-like, deserted your charge. I do not believe there is a rebel this side of the Valley. Has any one here seen even *one*?"

The commander of the squad who had followed Mrs. Meredith and her daughter, replied:

"Yes, captain, I saw some half-dozen in the edge of the woods yonder, and then the man with the iron hand came dashing forward, and informed me that at least a hundred rebels were awaiting us in ambush."

"A trick—a Yankee trick!" cried the captain. "I do not believe there were ten men to oppose you."

"Why should the fellow have so reported?"

"To frighten you and prevent pursuit. You have been egregiously fooled. Can't you see the trick?"

The officer addressed was mortified at this impeachment of his sagacity, and winced under

the imputation; but he was a subordinate, and satisfied himself with a frown and a sigh, indicative of a wish that he was not a subordinate, for a few moments at least.

The superior drove his spurs into the sides of the animal he was riding, and, with an angry growl, exclaimed:

"Follow me, all you who are not cowards!"

Each soldier turned the head of his horse toward the Miller farm, where the cattle had been left, and where the Yankees were supposed to be quartered. It was not an easy matter for the advancing party to make their way through the deep snow-drifts, but at length they came in sight of the dwelling and barn. There were no signs of life around, and the commander said:

"I'll wager a hundred pounds that the rebels are concealed yonder, quietly awaiting our approach, and that they think to capture us."

"What do you propose doing?" asked another.

"Send forward a scout. Here, sergeant, reconnoiter those premises."

The person so addressed started forward to do as directed. The time thus wasted had highly favored the Americans, in their attempt to get the cattle into their own camp.

At length the sergeant returned.

"Is there a rebel in sight?" asked the commander.

"Not one," was the reply. "And, more than that, the cattle have been taken from the yard, and there is a well-beaten track in the direction of Valley Forge, showing them to have gone that way."

"Forward!" yelled the infuriated commander.

The party soon reached the barn, and found matters as they had been reported.

"This path is well beaten," exclaimed the commander, as he pointed to the packed snow which evidently had been the direction taken by the drove. "We can ride rapidly in pursuit, and, as their progress must be slow, we can overtake, and not only regain possession of the cattle, but capture the rebels. Forward!"

The horsemen dashed ahead at a rapid rate, and the chagrin of the commander was great as mile after mile was passed, and there were no signs of the pursued. But, at length, their sight was greeted by the wished-for prize, and a yell broke from the cavalrymen. But the commander instantly reined up his horse, ordering a halt, exclaiming:

"It is no use. There are the picket-fires, and it is too late to regain possession of the cattle. If we advance any further, they will observe our approach, and we shall have a swarm of starving rebels down upon us."

Still the officer hesitated, and his subordinate asked:

"What do you intend doing, Captain Blaisdell?"

"I will inform you when I know myself. In the first place, answer me. Did not the Widow Meredith and her daughter leave the city early this morning?"

"Yes, both."

"And you were detailed to follow them and watch their actions?"

"Yes, sir, and did follow, as I was ordered."

"In what direction did they go?"

"Toward Valley Forge."

"That woman is a spy, and must be secured," exclaimed Blaisdell, biting his lips, and then he muttered something inaudible.

"You have met her, have you not, captain?" asked the subordinate.

"Yes, on several occasions."

"And her daughter, Laura, I believe you know?"

"Yes," replied the captain, and a frown flitted over his face.

"She rejected you, captain, I know. So you are an interested party in her escape." This was said as between two friends, not in the hearing of the troopers.

"Yes, Lieutenant MacCullum, she did reject me, and she shall yet repent the step she has taken."

"I learn that she has a lover in the rebel ranks, to whom she probably has fled."

"I know all about him. Harvey Osgood is the man. MacCullum, come here." The captain drew the subordinate aside, and said:

"It is my wish to capture that woman, and this very night. That I love Laura Meredith you well know, for you have been my confidant. That I shall not give her up without a struggle you may be assured. I must compass her capture—must get her in my power. If I could only get the mother charged with being a spy, I am convinced—for I have thought the matter over well—that Laura would accept my hand to save her mother. You have served me before, and for that service I bought the commission which you now hold. If you will successfully serve me in this, I am about to purchase a major's commission, and I will secure you sufficient funds to buy the one I vacate."

"But, how can I serve you? Mrs. Meredith is no doubt safe in the very heart of the Continental camp."

"Not so. I have been into the very lines of the rebel army a dozen times. The post you see before you, just at the foot of the hill, is commanded by Osgood in person—that I know. I met him on the hill, three days since, and in the disguise of a farmer, obtained much information of little things about the troops, their supplies of food, etc., but confounded little about what I most desired to learn. My plan was to secure Osgood and Frank Meredith, and so to force the girl to wed me for their safety. I know that young Frank is in Osgood's company, and that when on picket-duty they will be together. If both are at the outpost beyond the hill-road from the city, you may be sure the mother and daughter are there too. Their combined presence is a good fortune I did not anticipate, and I must see that it is improved to the very utmost."

"Do you intend to capture the entire party?"

"Yes, as soon as it is fully dark."

"Well, and how do you propose that I should assist you?"

"My plans are these. Of course there will be a guard thrown out in this direction, as it is quite dark now. We must reconnoiter a little, and then make a sudden dash upon that post, capture the ladies, the son and Osgood, if possible, and make our escape, by this beaten road, back to the city."

"But you might accomplish this without my special assistance."

"No. The woman is accused of being a spy, and *you* were sent to track her. Report to headquarters that she was *not* a spy—that she had merely gone to visit some friends over the river, when she was seized a prisoner by the Yankees, under the suspicion that she was a *British* spy, and was conveyed by them to their camp."

"I confess I cannot see the policy in this."

"Why, it is clear enough. If I can secure the hand of Miss Meredith, under the promise that her mother shall be free, I must keep my word. And, if the old lady once gets into the hands of Howe, with such a charge hanging over her, it will be no easy matter for *me* to save her, as you must see. I want *you* to seize the dame. Detail your men to help you, and attend *only* to that; to the daughter, I will attend. Sergeant Willis shall attend to the boy."

"Had we not better let him alone? If he is taken he can not so easily be disposed of. And, should he suffer, either in the conflict, or in prison, of course there would be an eternal hatred in the heart of both sister and mother against you."

"That is true, so never mind him. Indeed, he had better not be taken."

"What other instructions?"

"When you have the dame in your possession take her to the city, at once, and to my own house, or the one I occupy occasionally. Deliver her into the hands of Mike Duggan, with especial charge that she be well treated by him and wife; but give particular orders that by no means shall she be permitted to go outside of the house, or to confer with any one inside of it. She must be kept out of sight, or my whole scheme might miscarry, and place me in a pretty scrape."

"And yourself?"

"I shall go in a different direction with my prize, where I already have provided a safe place for her. She will, of course, be treated with the utmost respect and kindness. Further than gentle persuasion, through her sympathies for her mother, I shall not even press my suit for her hand; but that, I believe, will suffice."

It was now quite dark, and the two officers started forward on their reconnoitering expedition, while the dragoons drew to a place of concealment among the heavy trees which crowned the hill.

The result of the reconnoissance was unexpectedly satisfactory, and demonstrated the fact that the outpost had all been withdrawn to the picket headquarters, that there was no more than twenty to encounter, and that the two ladies themselves were indeed present!

Blaisdell could scarcely refrain from expressing his joy over the happy prospect before him. Hastening back to the point where his troops were concealed, he detailed half a dozen men who were to act with him, and half a dozen more to assist MacCullum; but, so excited was he, that he entirely overlooked giving instructions with regard to Frank Meredith.

With cautious step the dragoons set forth. They reached the brow of the hill. Before them

was a gentle slope of half a mile, at the foot of which was the picket-post, with its covering of dead boughs, and the huge fire, which emitted ten thousand sparks, seeming to fill the air for a considerable distance around with glistening gold. Here sat the poor patriots partaking of their New Year feast—as rare a feast to them as was the feast of manna in the wilderness—all unconscious of approaching danger. Mother and son, long parted, were seated side by side; near by sat the daughter and Osgood. Around were gathered, in picturesque groups, the Continental guards. It was a pleasant picture, so clearly limned by that clear fire that the dragoons could almost read the language of each face.

The dragoons, covered by the darkness, and their horses' footfalls deadened by the snow, were upon the camp before an alarm was given. In a moment, however, the unequal struggle was ended. Mrs. Meredith was seized, as had been arranged, as was also her daughter. They were separated, and the fate of each was unknown to the other. The patriot soldiers were secured in a body, and hurried forward toward the city with a celerity which spoke well for the discipline of the Britons. All this had taken place with the discharge of a single gun. Even the rangers, usually so alert and ready, were caught "off guard"—their arms stacked, and their attention wholly absorbed in the feast before them. The first information was given by Osgood the next morning after reaching headquarters.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD NANCY'S CABIN.

POOR Laura Meredith could not, for a long time, comprehend her position. A moment before her heart was almost wild in its delirium of joy. Seated beside her chosen one, she was lost to every other thought than present bliss and future hopes. But the scene had changed so suddenly. Now she was whirling along over the glistening snow, seated upon a spirited horse, while beside her, on either hand, rode strangers. They were evidently solicitous in her behalf, for they studied every art for her comfort during that cold night-ride. On for many miles they went. She began to feel the cutting wind and the keen frost, and she unconsciously murmured:

"I am very cold."

"Halt!" cried a voice, which she at once recognized, and which aroused her from her stupor. The speaker continued:

"Let me wrap you in this blanket, Miss Laura. The night is a bitter one, and we have yet some distance to ride."

"Captain Blaisdell!" exclaimed the captive, in surprise. "You my captor?"

"Yes, dear lady," was the kind reply, "and your most devoted friend also. Wrap this blanket-shawl around you."

The captive did as requested, and then spoke, as if echoing the words just uttered by Blaisdell.

"Devoted friend, you said?"

"Yes; all that, and more than that! Do you not believe me?"

"I do not see that your conduct is such as to gain my regard or prove your friendship."

"And yet all that has been done is proof of my consideration for you and yours."

"How can you justify this seizure of myself?"

"When we reach our destination I will explain all. In the mean time, believe that I have acted from regard for you and your mother. Look behind you. What do you see?"

"Some dozen of your men."

"Yes; and do you not understand it?"

"No; unless it means that I am a prisoner."

"No. It means that you are *not* a prisoner. If such was the case you would be with the larger party, whom we have distanced, and who are now on their way to Philadelphia."

"Oh, in mercy tell me, is my poor mother a prisoner?"

"Be calm," replied the horseman, soothingly.

"If such is the case, I shall do all for her that I can for your sake, if not for her own."

"Oh, it would kill me if harm should come to her!" sobbed the girl.

Blaisdell smiled, for he now realized how fully she was in his power. That she would consent to marriage, *for her mother's sake*, he believed but a question of days only. And might he not win her love? She was quite young; her affection for Osgood could not be deeply rooted; and if she felt gratitude for saving her parent, might it not, in time, turn to love, its nearest kin? His reflections were pleasant, and, for a long time, he remained silent, apparently lost in thought. He was aroused at length.

"Here we are, captain."

He started, and gazed around him.

"By Jove, it is so, sure enough. How is it with you, Miss Laura?"

The girl did not speak. Blaisdell sprung from his horse and caught her in his arms. As he did so, he cried:

"My God! she is frozen!"

He appeared to be really agonized, and bore her into a small log dwelling before which the party had halted. Placing her upon a bed which stood in one corner of the room, he returned to the open air and gave orders for his companions to return at once to Philadelphia.

Returning to the room he found that Laura was conscious, but had become so benumbed with cold as not to be able to speak. She had not been entirely unconscious, and had witnessed the evident feeling exhibited by Blaisdell when he thought her senseless, and it made a favorable impression upon her. He approached and spoke in kind tones, telling her she was safe, and that, as soon as she was sufficiently recovered, he would explain all to her.

The building and the room she occupied were the abode of poor people evidently. The apartment was perhaps twelve feet square, and appeared to be the only one. On one side was a rude fireplace, in which a cheerful fire was blazing, diffusing a genial warmth throughout the whole room, spite of the bitterness without, and which also furnished the only light. On the opposite side was a rude straw mat and a number of woolen blankets. A small table, a stool, and a log sawed to the length of about eighteen inches, and standing upon end, thus forming a seat, and a few working utensils, appeared to form the entire furniture, save the bed

upon which Laura was resting. This seemed to be much out of place, as it was of a very comfortable character.

When Blaisdell entered with his charge, an old woman arose from the straw couch and rags and tottered to the block which was near the chimney-corner. She did not appear to give the slightest heed to the intruders. But, taking an old pipe from a niche in the wall, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and began puffing away.

Laura saw the old woman, and asked of Blaisdell:

"Who is this? and why am I brought here?"

"One moment, and I will tell you." Then, addressing the old crone, he asked: "Nancy, has the wine arrived?"

The old woman remained silent for a moment more. Then she drew forth a pair of old iron spectacles and placed them upon her nose. Then slowly raising her head, she asked, in a coarse, guttural voice:

"Don't the young lady like smoke?"

"Presume she has no serious objections. But where is the wine?"

"It's all gone up chimney."

"What, the wine?"

Nancy appeared to be one of the kind who think twice before she spoke once, for this time her pause was long, and evidently quite provoking to the captain. At last she raised her finger, and made the sign of smoke curling up, like the wreaths which were ascending from her own pipe.

"Oh, yes, I understand you," said Blaisdell; "you mean to signify that the smoke has gone all up the chimney, and will not offend the lady. That is well. But tell me, where is the wine?"

Nancy pointed under the bed upon which Laura was now sitting. Blaisdell found it there. He drew forth a bottle and poured some of its sparkling contents into glasses, handing one to Laura.

"Drink; it will enable you to listen to me calmly."

Laura declined the proffered glass indignantly. Then she looked steadily into the eyes of Blaisdell, and said:

"Go on—tell me of my mother and my brother."

"Will you pardon me if I address you by a title I one day hope to have the right to use? I intend no offense, but hope to establish my right, even by this night's experience, to call you my more than friend—my own beloved Laura."

"I told you, Captain Blaisdell, when you called at my mother's residence, only a few days since, that I could never be more to you than a passing friend, and my determination is unalterable. I am the betrothed of another, and have no right even to permit endearing terms from you."

Be not so sanguine upon that point. We are all apt to change. And now that Lieutenant Osgood has fallen—

"Osgood fallen!" shrieked the poor girl. "Harry Osgood fallen, did you say?"

"Yes. He fell during the fight last evening."

"And by *your* hand?"

"No; I did not strike the blow. My only

thought was now I should save you and your mother. You are safe for the present, and I hope to save her."

"You hope to save my mother! Oh! tell me the worst at once."

"I will, dear Laura, but you must nerve yourself to bear it. You need not mourn the death of Osgood, for he was a traitor, even to your cause."

"Osgood a traitor! Oh! no, no! This is a wretched time to slander a brave man, and one so true as he has been to the dear cause of my country."

"A double traitor, nevertheless, Miss Meredith. A traitor to the cause, and to you and your poor mother!"

"In heaven's name explain yourself!"

"Certainly. For some time past, Lieutenant Osgood, as he is called, has been in constant communication with General Howe. He has furnished the general with a plan of the Continental camp, its defenses, outposts, condition, and, in fact, with all the important information he could obtain."

"I will not believe it—no, not if Howe himself was to swear it."

"You will believe it before I am through explaining. Did he not know of your mother's intended visit?"

"I believe he did."

"Who informed him?"

"A person called Zeke Hunter."

"Yes. The man with the iron band or hook. He that was engaged for a week collecting poultry for the rebel camp."

"How know you of this?"

"Oh! it was all known at headquarters. The movements of your mother have been watched for the past two weeks, night and day. Did you not observe a party following you, after you crossed the river?"

"Yes. But if my mother was suspected, why was she not arrested then?"

"It does appear a little singular, does it not?"

"It does, if you supposed my mother to be a spy, as I suppose you did, by keeping that studied guard over her, going and coming."

"She was so supposed, and her arrest was ordered, but not at that place. And yet we knew you were both going to the rebel camp."

"You surely did not hope to reach us there?"

"We did reach you nevertheless, as you must confess."

"That was by mere chance. We were at the outer picket-post, and all the guards had been withdrawn, so the alarm was not given as you were approaching."

"Ha! ha! ha! Excuse me for laughing, but you are a credulous young lady. However, you will see it all clearly in a few moments, and doubtless will act as becomes your noble nature. Your mother was supposed to be a spy, but the proof was not positive. We had only the word of one man for this—and he of doubtful character—aside from her own acts. It became necessary to see her visit Washington's camp, and to arrest her while there. Then, of course, the proof would be positive. You say it was by chance that you were on the picket line, and

that the guard were all withdrawn. It was not by chance but by design!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean just what I say. I have frequently been the messenger from General Howe to Osgood, near the Continental lines. I met him there three days since, on the hill adjoining the camp. Of course I was dressed as a farmer—a character I can well assume. He informed me at that time, that your mother would visit camp yesterday, and that she came with information to the general. He stated that he would withdraw all the outer guard to the main post, so that we would find no difficulty in approaching. He also said that your brother Frank would be at the post, and, as it would be quite as comfortable as any within the camp, no doubt your mother would remain there with her son during the night, or at least during the evening. A party was sent to capture her at the post."

"And all this was arranged by Harry Osgood?"

"It was, entirely by his own act and order."

"What could possibly have been his motive?"

"He said that he wanted the 'old woman' out of the way, as she would only be a burden to him after he had married the daughter and her fortune! And that, after having secured the fortune, he could go to England and enjoy it, with or without you, as he pleased."

"Oh! horrible!" groaned the heart-stricken girl, as she burst into tears.

"Do not weep, dear Laura; I deem it best that you should know the man as he was, at once, or I should not now have wounded you by a recital of his perfidy. But he is gone to his last account, and you must now give yourself no pain about him."

The poor girl raised her head and asked:

"Do you not profess to be our friend?"

"I do so profess, and now so protest—your devoted friend."

"Then why did you not come at once and apprise us of this plot? If this had been done, my mother would not have left the city."

"You shall know the truth, Laura. I intended to have come direct to your house to put you on your guard. But, on my return, I met a squad of men in command of an officer superior in rank to myself. I was compelled to go direct to headquarters and report, as my mission was known. You know that I am bound by oath, and I could not report falsely. It grieved me to make the statement, but I thought I should even then be able to warn your mother of her danger."

"And why did you not do so?"

"Because I was immediately detailed for duty, which spared me not a moment's time, until it was too late. I could not send a messenger with the information, for your house was watched, and I feared if I wrote, the letter might be intercepted. I could intrust no one with so important a verbal message."

"And yet you were in command of the troops who attacked the post, were you not?"

"Yes, I sought this special privilege."

"You sought it. For what reason, pray?"

"You shall know. I went personally to the general, telling him that I was familiar with the ground, and solicited the command, which was

readily granted. Can you not conceive my motive for this?"

"I cannot, I confess. It surely was not a duty a *friend* should like to perform."

"And yet, my dear Laura, it was a friendly service I performed toward you, at least, whom I have saved. I wished also to save your mother."

"Why could you not also accomplish this?"

"It was impossible at that time. The order was only for the arrest of one female—Mrs. Meredith. I knew you would be with her. Of course it became necessary, after the arrest of your mother was made, to convey her to headquarters. If this was not done, I would be held to account. Had you, also, been taken before General Howe, you would have been held upon the same charge with your mother."

"It matters little. If she suffers, it will kill me. Oh, would that I were with her now!"

"I intend to save her yet."

"You do! Oh! may God bless you for those words. But is she now in Philadelphia?"

"She must be before this time. I know she was seized and placed upon a horse, the same as yourself, but we rode on in the advance."

"Will not those soldiers who came with us here report the fact of my own arrest?"

"Not necessarily. But it matters not, for I intend removing you to more comfortable quarters in the city, as soon as I can do so with safety. In the mean time, I have engaged old Nancy here to care for you. I have provided a few comforts, which I trust will be satisfactory under the circumstances."

"But how can you save my mother, now that she is a prisoner in Philadelphia? Will she not be tried?"

"Yes, I suppose she must go before a court-martial at once, for Howe is not lenient toward rebel spies. The city is full of them, of high and low degree. They come in every imaginable and unimaginable guise, and Howe is thoroughly incensed against them, especially persons of position, like your mother."

"Then she must be convicted."

"Yes. I myself must appear against her as a witness."

"Oh! you will not do this?"

"I shall be compelled to do so. But it would matter little if I did not; for there is sufficient evidence to convict her even without mine."

"And is it possible they can condemn her to death?"

"That is the penalty, and the laws of war are inexorable."

"Oh! save her, Captain Blaisdell, save her," cried Laura, passionately, "and I will be your slave for life," and the unhappy maid moaned, in the bitterness of her agony.

"You would be but a sorry slave, dear Laura," said the captain, as he took her hand. "But listen to me. In saving her I must sacrifice every thing. If I am detected—and no doubt I shall be—I should be cashiered in disgrace from the army, and banished forever from any country. But I would bear even this, if your love repaid me. I would brave any thing for you. I will open the prison doors and set your mother free, and then I will convey you both beyond the reach of harm, if you will

promise, in presence of the angels, that, when I have done so, you will become my wife!"

Laura shuddered but did not speak.

"Think!" cried Blaisdell, "the man upon whom you lavished your pure affection was a man unworthy of a thought, were he living. That affection you will, as an honorable woman, banish from your heart, or you would be unworthy of your patriotic mother. A new love will take its place; and where will it be more fittingly bestowed than upon the one to whom you are indebted for your mother's life, and one who is willing to sacrifice all for you?"

"Captain Blaisdell," and Laura turned her blue eyes upon the man. Her face was as pale as death, and her lips bloodless, as she spoke; "if you bring my mother to me in safety, and all you have told me is true, I *will* be your wife."

"Will you solemnly swear this?"

"Before my Maker!"

The Briton pressed his lips to her own. But they were cold, and there was no returning pressure.

The young girl gazed around her, as if half unconscious, and then asked:

"Where am I?"

"This cabin is directly across the Schuylkill from the fort. It is a safe place for you, as no person would think of looking into this hut for spies. It is directly under our guns."

"And who is this old woman?"

"Oh! she is a harmless old creature, called Nancy. I don't know her other name. She sells fruit in the city, sometimes, and her husband saws wood, and such like menial employment. She is very poor, and will willingly keep you here as her ward as long as it is necessary, for the compensation she will receive. So, fear nothing. Avoid the Yankees—it is your only safety—and remember your mother and your oath! I must go to the city now."

"And my mother?"

"*Shall* be saved. So, fear nothing. I will visit you again, soon."

The officer left the house, apparently as light of heart as one conscious of a good deed.

"Now then, for the letter to General Washington," he muttered, half audibly, as he hurried away. "Scene Number Two. Good! Plain sailing, now. I tapped him on the head, but the hurt would only serve to keep him at his post for a few hours. He shall *swing* for it—that's the plan! and then there will be no obstacle between me and my hopes—not one! The mother is in my power. I can return her to the daughter when I like. But I must first make *her* believe that she is to be brought up and tried as a spy, and that I rescue her. This is good—this is glorious!"

The man crossed the river, and rode rapidly along the streets, toward the quarters of General Howe. It was broad daylight.

CHAPTER V.

IN, AND OUT AGAIN!

THE British dragoons, fearing that their presence might be discovered, made all possible haste, as already stated, to secure their prisoners. The post had been surrounded, so that not a soul escaped, excepting Osgood, and him they

supposed to be dead. Mrs. Meredith was placed upon a horse, while the two rangers, Frank and the other, were firmly tied, and made to march between files of men. After a weary journey, they arrived opposite Philadelphia. Not a word was spoken during the march, by any but the British soldiers, and these were jubilant over their capture, and would have been wild with delight had they known that they held in their keeping two of the most intrepid spies and scouts in the American service. Happily, however, so well had the rangers always masked their true characters before the enemy, that they entertained but small fear of detection. Still, they were, as Frank afterward said, in the tiger's power, and that fact seemed to impress them with a sense of danger, which they had not often felt. MacCullum had made several attempts to draw Mrs. Meredith into conversation, but she gave him no heed. Her thoughts were divided between her daughter, her son—who was a prisoner with her—and her friends. She did not think of herself, or, at least, she did not presume she would be charged with being a spy, as she had never acted as such. Her crime, as the British would term it, could be nothing more than "giving aid and comfort to the enemy."

Her chief anxiety was for her daughter. She saw Captain Blaisdell during the attack, and her child had almost instantly after disappeared. He must have seized her, and borne her away. She had not seen Osgood fall, and that afforded her some consolation. He was not a prisoner, and perhaps he had rescued Laura. All the agonies which could wring a mother's heart were her own; but she determined to bear bravely up, at least until she knew the worst. She was somewhat surprised, however, when the party had reached the city, to see MacCullum take the horse she rode by the bridle, and, without so much as a single attendant, take her away down Broad street, while the remainder of the party kept directly onward toward the City Hall. As this building came to view, Dan spoke:

"I say, Zeke, do you see that shanty?"

"What shanty do you mean?" asked Zeke.

"Why, that brick 'un, jest ahead."

"Oh! you mean the Capitol."

"Jest so. That's goin' to be the meetin'-place of men who will declare America free from the rule of tyrants."

"Take care what you say, you old dog; that's treason!" exclaimed one of the red-coats.

"Oh! that's treason, is it? Wal, as one of the big guns said, when he was talkin' about these red beauties that rule this city, 'If *that's* treason, make the most of it'—and be danged to ye, ye stipendiary beggar—if ye knows what that is."

"Dan," said Frank, "we are in the tiger's power; it is not best to irritate him. Discretion is now the better part of valor."

"Wal, you may be right, Frank. But, ye see, it's different with you and the rest of the boys, from what it is with us two rangers. You are only prisoners of war, while we are—"

"Hold your jaw. Can't you keep that clapper of yourn still?" And Zeke gave Dan a stroke across the face with his stub arm, which

fairly made his teeth rattle in his head, and came near knocking him off his feet. Zeke added:

"Forgive me, Dan. I didn't intend to hit you so hard, but, ye see, ye came near blurting our secret right in the ears of the inimy."

Dan looked up with a frown upon his face, but it instantly changed into a saddened expression, as he answered:

"Yes, Zeke. I'll forgive ye. And if you had intended the blow, still, I would forgive you, for it won't be more than two or three days before you and I will both be glad to find ourselves forgiven, there!" and Dan pointed to the skies; "for I believe these red puppies knows all about us. But let 'em know—the scoundrels—who cares!"

These words were spoken in a tone so low, that they were not overheard by the British soldiers. Zeke answered:

"Yes, Dan, if we do go before Howe, it's all up with us, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless we can outwit the onion-skins, and pull the wool over their eyes, you know."

"Zeke evidently had caught sight of something which interested him, for he paused suddenly, made a significant nod, and then added:

"And that is half-done already!"

"What's up, old fellow?"

"Oh, nothing much, only I was afraid we would be taken to some outlandish hole, and that none of our friends would know where we were. Then, of course, we could not hope for a rescue, and would have to depend entirely on our wits, which, you know, are none of the brightest."

"Look here, old fellow, you've see'd something. Can't fool this coon. Any of the boys lurkin' ar'ound?"

"Jes' so, Dan. Keep yer eyes skinned, an' yer mouth shut. I caught a glimpse of—"

These words were cut short by the voice of the sergeant, calling:

"Here you are, you rebel dogs. The captain will be here in an hour, and you will have a fair prospect of hanging the next. How do you like that, old book?" he added, addressing Zeke.

"I had rather hang than be in your place," retorted Dan.

"Oh! you'll sing a different song when the rope is around your neck."

"Yes, I'll sing the tune you were never born to hear but to your sorrow"—and he at once commenced whistling "Yankee Doodle," with a trumpet-like shrillness, which arrested the guard's bullying at once. Anything but that tune for British ears. An Iroquois war-whoop, or scalp-howl were preferable.

Our friends were taken into a cell in the basement of the Capitol, and for some time were left to themselves.

"Zeke, who was it you saw in the street?" asked Dan, as soon as they were relieved of their guards' presence.

"It was Sim Morris."

"Yes, and if Sim Morris don't keep his eyes open, he'll get himself in the same fix we are in. He won't carry much more information to Washington if he once gets here—that's my opinion, without pay. Give us a chaw of tobacco, chief."

Zeke extended the inevitable plug of "Virginia twist," as he added:

"Don't be alarmed, Dan. Sim has as many disguises as there's hairs in your head. The messenger of St. Peter would have a hard time to make up his account, 'cause the fellow isn't the same chap two hours at a time."

"What is his last one?"

"His last? Ha! ha! It might have been General Howe's body-servant, or it might have been a grenadier of the Royal Guard, or it might have been a fishwoman."

"How then did you know it *was* Sim, when you saw him?"

"I didn't see him at all."

"Then how the dogs and cats do you know he saw us?"

"Dan, you are growing dull of late; your ears are not as sharp as they were a year ago. Guess you've chewed too much mean to-backer."

"Oh! I understand. You heard him?"

"Jes' so! Hark!"

A voice was heard without. It was evidently that of an Irishman. He was singing in a half-guttural voice—a portion of the words being distinguishable, while others were entirely lost. After the song had ceased, Dan said:

"That is Sim, sure enough, for he's got the rangers' alphabet, which Beelzebub himself couldn't understand. He tells us that he will keep watch of us, and that Brandon has learned our situation."

"Jes' as I expected. A pretty ranger he would be to let us come in as prisoners an' not know all about it. We're all right, for Brand is as full of devices as a Hessian is of lice, and he can jes' beat a Yorkshireman in lying—so take another twist at the plug."

"That may all be," growled Dan, "but Brand'll have to stir his pegs to get us out o' this. I should not be surprised, Zeke, if they hung you and I in half an hour—the dod-rotted sneaks and women-whippers."

"Oh, hush sich talk. We wasn't born to die by a roval rope. Jes' keep a stiff upper lip, and leave all to the fortune of war, like a true blue. If we do die, we can have this consolation: that we have served our country faithfully. Combine that with the sart'in circumstance that we are getting old, I think we can afford to die—swing, if needs be, but with blessings for our poor country, and a prayer for its brave defenders, and its chief, George Washington."

"Amen!" was the response of every tongue.

"That's the talk, blast their eyes! Three cheers for glory!" shouted Dan; but the cheers were cut short by the sudden drawing of the heavy bolts.

The prison-door opened, and a sergeant with a file of men stepped in, while a small squad of red-coats were visible through the open door. The officer held a paper in his hand, which he opened, glanced at its contents, and then read aloud:

"William Miller and Daniel Disbrow."

Dan sprang to his feet and said:

"Here, sergeant. I am Dan Disbrow, but old Bill Miller is not here."

"Where is he?" demanded the sergeant.

"He has just escaped."

"Escaped! That is impossible. There is not a hole in this room large enough for a rat to crawl through."

"Oh! he didn't come into this room at all. He slipped away while the rest of us were being stowed in here."

The sergeant called one of the men to enter, for the purpose of recognizing Miller, if he should be present. The man glanced around the party, and at length his eyes fell upon Frank Meredith.

"I think this is the Yankee," said the soldier, as he pointed to Frank.

Hunter was about to reply, when Frank touched his arm.

"Don't speak. In Heaven's name be quiet," the youth said, in a whisper.

"No," answered the ranger. "It is me they want. I represented myself as Bill Miller, and that is the reason they have my name down as Miller. I will not be quiet, and let you suffer in my stead."

"There is not the slightest danger. There will be plenty at my trial to swear I am *not* the man. Blaisdell himself will have to do that, and, if they can be made to believe that you have escaped, they may not make any further examination, and you will in time be released."

"Don't deceive yourself, my lad. I am too well known to the rogues I fooled yesterday, and must be recognized as soon as this arm comes to the light of day. Besides, I will not desert Dan at such a moment. We are bound by oath to stand by one another, through thick and thin, and I won't play sneak now."

"You can do him no good if you are by his side. But, if you could only gain your liberty, you might help him. Now, be quiet, and do your best as a Yankee. Get loose if you can, and we shall rely on you for help at the right time."

"Come, be quick," called out the sergeant, impatient at their long undertone conference.

Dan and Frank stepped forth, the latter asking:

"Where are we to be taken, sergeant?"

"You two before the general."

"And the others?"

"To the prison-ship, in the river."

"How soon?"

"Now—at once—under this guard. So get ready, all of you."

Zeke was reflecting over young Meredith's suggestions. They were good ones, but how to render them available, was the question. If he was taken to the ship, there might be some chance of escape. Once free, he felt that he could be of great benefit to his friends, if it was not then too late. He knew that the vessel used as a prison-ship was an old hulk, then frozen fast in the ice at the lower end of the island in the Delaware, now known as Smith's Island. He determined to remain silent, and await results.

Dan and Frank stepped into the hall, and, as they passed along, saw the others brought from the cell, and escorted down the street toward the Delaware. Just as Frank was about to enter the main hall of the Capitol, an old wo-

man, who held a basket of apples upon her arm, exclaimed:

"Oh, holy St. Patrick! Look at that! Is it sich a young-lookin' boy as that as ye're goin' to hang up by the neck? Oh, murther! Here, child, take an apple from the ould woman. Yees wilcom' to it, intirely."

Frank took the apple proffered him, and placed it in his pocket. He passed on, and thought no further of the incident, and only at the time received it simply as an exhibition of the old woman's kind heart, or her pity for his youth.

The party at once were ushered into the presence of the general. He glanced at them, and then asked:

"Why are you here?"

"By permission of your royal servants—these men in red flannel," answered Dan.

"And you, young man; why is it that you do not wear the Yankee uniform?"

"Simply because I cannot afford such a luxury," replied Frank in a manly voice.

"Then you do admit that you are a rebel?"

"Yes, sir. I belong to the patriot army."

"Indeed! You are accused of being a spy."

"The accusation is false, sir. I have never been near your lines since I entered that army to which I am attached, excepting when I have met you in battle. I was seized last night at Valley Forge. I have never left the Valley during the winter. There is a mistake. They call me Miller, and one of your men pointed me out to the sergeant as such; but, I dare say, the officers who captured me can tell you that I am not the man you think. I am told the man called Miller has made his escape."

Captain Blaisdell now entered the room to give an account of the affair in which he had been engaged. He gave his statement at once, but carefully avoided making any mention of the ladies he had seized. This somewhat surprised Frank, but he was also highly gratified, for he feared his mother would also be charged with being a spy. When the report was made, the general asked:

"Did you not bring in several Yankee spies among your prizes?"

"General, I brought in one whom I *know* to be a spy. Miller is his name. He has an iron hand or hook. You have seen him often here."

"Yes, I remember him well, and he is a great rascal, as indeed, all these Yankees are."

"Very true, sir; he deceived our men yesterday, and it was through his means that we lost those cattle. Few persons could have accomplished what he did with his effrontery and hazard."

"Neither of these is the man, I infer."

The general pointed to Dan and Frank. Blaisdell gazed at them for a few moments, and, pointing to Frank, said:

"That young man is not one with the rogues, by any means."

"But, he was captured in the rebel camp."

"True, general; but I learn that he was persuaded there by those who ought to be ashamed of themselves. His family are most respectable, and, I believe, thoroughly loyal; else I should not consent to make his sister my wife, which is to be the case."

Blaisdell cast a significant look at Frank, which the latter did not at all understand. He never had heard the name of Blaisdell mentioned in connection with his sister. The captain continued:

"General, I wish to have some conversation with this boy. I have no doubt I can counteract many of the bad influences which have been brought to bear upon him. I will be answerable for him."

Turning to Frank, he continued:

"Young man, in one week from this time, I shall be the husband of your sister. Your mother gives her consent, deeming it her best course. Your sister has also consented, for the same reason. Now, if you will pledge me your word of honor as a gentleman, that you will not leave the city for one week, and that, after my marriage with your sister, if you still refuse to join us, or at least *not* to return to the rebels, you will again present yourself to the general for his decision, you shall be free to go where you like, as a citizen of Philadelphia."

"Come a little aside with me," said Frank.

This was done.

The thought had flashed through the mind of the boy in an instant, that his mother and sister had consented to the marriage to save him, and that it was Blaisdell's intention that they should not be arraigned for inquiry, or trial, as emissaries of the patriot leader. He determined, as far as possible, to turn this to account. He therefore said:

"My sister marries you to save me?"

"That is one reason, although I cannot but feel that she weds me for myself alone."

"Very well, I will give you my word of honor. But, I must see my mother and sister in the mean time."

"That will be impossible."

"Then I refuse any parole or limited release."

"Very well, if you will have it so. But you had better think again."

Frank was thoughtful for a moment. Perhaps he might, *find* his mother and sister. He felt satisfied that something was not right, for Laura had appeared so happy in the company of Osgood only the day before. He resolved to fathom the mystery. He could, perhaps, gain another point by giving his consent, and by deceiving a deceiver secure the co-operation of the ranger. He spoke firmly at once:

"Captain, that man," pointing to Dan, "is not a soldier; neither is he a spy. He may be friendly to our cause, and once or twice has visited our camp. But he has not been playing the go-between, as you seem to infer."

"But I have seen him here in the city."

"It is not possible, I say. He is a countryman knows more of corn and cabbage than of fight, and ought not to be held here as a prisoner—much less a spy. It is not creditable to your discrimination to put such a man through as a spy. You'll make nothing of it, rest assured."

"It shall be as you say, young man, if you know what you speak."

Blaisdell then stated to the general that Frank had given him the required promise, and that he would answer with his commission for the fulfillment of that pledge. He also stated that

Dan was *not* the suspected party, and that he was assured he was an honest, hard-working man, although evidently tinctured with republican notions. But, he thought him to be a harmless clod-hopper. At that moment Lieutenant MacCullum came into the room. A wink from Blaisdell sufficed to give him to understand how matters stood, and, in answer to the captain's adroit questions, he confirmed all that that officer had stated.

"But, where are the spies?" asked Howe. "Why have I been advised of their seizure, if they are not produced?"

"I am of the opinion that they could not have been captured, but escaped during the confusion of the fight."

After a warning and a few words of advice, both Dan and Frank were permitted to leave the room. They reached the street free men, where one of them had expected death, and the other a long imprisonment. It was unaccountable, even though the mystery had been partially explained. But, *the ranger was free, and now to action!*

CHAPTER VI.

BLAISDELL ON A MISSION.

WHEN Lieutenant MacCullum left the dragoons, he made the best of his way, in company with Mrs. Meredith, to a small house situated on Broad street, which, at that time, was in the extreme suburbs of the city. He alighted, and then assisted Mrs. Meredith to do the same. MacCullum said:

"You will enter here, Mrs. Meredith. I must return to headquarters."

"I am not a prisoner, then!" exclaimed the lady, with some degree of surprise.

"Not exactly a prisoner, but you must remain here."

"But why not permit me to return to my own house?"

"Because you would be at once arrested as a spy. Your safety consists in your remaining concealed."

"I do not understand all this."

"It will be explained at the proper time by the captain."

"Is my daughter within?"

"I do not know. If not, you will soon receive a visit from Captain Blaisdell, and he will give you all the information you require."

"Is this dwelling occupied at present?"

"It is occupied by two people, Mike Duggan and his wife. They are servants in the pay of the captain. They are expecting you, and will treat you well."

MacCullum mounted his horse, and rode rapidly away, while Mrs. Meredith entered the house.

She was met at the door by a good-natured looking woman, whose tone and manner at once proclaimed her a native of the Emerald Isle. Behind her, and peering over her shoulders, were a pair of small, twinkling eyes, which evidently belonged to a small man, for they were upon an exact level with the woman's shoulder. As Mrs. Meredith entered the hall, the female exclaimed:

"Come in, darlint, come in! If ye are in any trouble, Mickey an' me—that's my husband,

sure—sthand up, Mickey, an' sphake to the illigant lady, like a man—ye'll find Mickey an' me as 'ill do ye all the good we can. Sit down, darlint. Ye look e'ena'most froze. Mickey, sthur up the fire!"

"Were you expecting any person?" asked Mrs. Meredith.

"Is it a-spectin' anybody that I am? Sure, we're always 'spectin' somebody, an' sometimes can help a body a bit."

Mickey now found his tongue. He came forward, and asked:

"Sure, mum, an' ar'n't ye Mishes Meredith?"

"Whist, Mickey—hold yer gab! Don't be axin' questions."

And the wife gave him a poke in the ribs.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Meredith," was that lady's reply.

"The 'un as sends so many good things to poor Washington and his starvin' boys, God bless 'em!" and Mickey made a cross of devotion, while he wiped his eye with the sleeve of his coat.

"Whist—hold yer gab, and don't be talkin'," again put in his wife. "P'raps the walls have ears, or the air has tongues—so be whist wid ye!"

"But I will be afther talkin', Biddy darlint, when I meets sich as this. If ye be's in any throuble, Mrs. Meredith, jes' let Mickey Duggan know it, an' he'll give his life to serve ye, or to hilp the good cause, ye know," he added, in a whisper.

"Then you sympathize with Washington, do you, Mr. Duggan?" asked Mrs. Meredith.

"That I do, mum, body and sowl; both Bridget an' me—don't we, darlint?" and his Irish face beamed with Irish gratification.

"And how is it that you are here, serving such a man as Captain Blaisdell?"

"Ouch, an' ye see—"

"Mickey, have a care! It'll not do, me boy, to talk iverything jist here."

"Oh, darlint, I know who I am sp'akin' to. Yees see, Mrs. Meredith, the captain he hires me to do his dhirty work for 'em, and, savin' yer prisence, I sometimes make a botch of it; do it the wrong way, badad, an' things don't come out always at the right door, may the red-coats be hanged!"

"What do you mean?"

"Did ye iver hear o' Sim Morris?"

"Yes, often. He is a faithful fellow, and true to the cause of liberty—true as steel."

"Don't sp'ake so!" and Mickey wiped his eyes again, and so did Biddy.

"Why should I not speak so?"

"Yees may, and God bless yees! Well, ye see, when the capt'n wants any dhirty work done, he comes to me to do it. So Mickey Duggan does it precious bad, and Sim Morris, the sphalpeen, he sph'iles it altogether."

"I suspect that Sim Morris and Mickey Duggan are one and the same person!" said Mrs. Meredith, with a smile.

"Ma'm, ye're a witch at guessin'!"

"But how do you avoid detection, Mike?"

"If there's anything ye wish me to do, ma'm, jes' say the word, an' I'll be after showin' ye how I do it."

"Well, Sim—"

"Call me Mickey, if ye pl'ase, here, ma'm, 'ca'se ye might be afther making a mistake when the capt'n was around, an' that would sph'ile one of Washington's mail-bags, and make me chief of the dead-letter office sure, wid a rope round me nick."

"I will remember, Mike. Now I will tell you what I wish you to do, if you can without too great personal danger. Some of our friends were captured last night, and they are now being taken to prison, as I suppose. My own son is among them. I wish you would go down and ascertain what is to be done with them."

"Whoop! I'll do that same!" and Mickey bounded into the street in an instant, without uttering another word.

He had scarcely left, when another step was heard in the hall, and then a tap at the parlor-door. Biddy opened it, and Captain Blaisdell entered. He bowed in a very polite manner to Mrs. Meredith, and that lady returned it coldly.

"Are you well, after the fatigues and exposure of last night?" he asked.

"As could be expected. May I ask the business of Captain Blaisdell with me?"

"Business! Why, you are my guest!"

"This is your house?"

"It is, for the present, at least."

"Then may I ask why I am forced to become your guest?"

"I will answer that question by asking another: Would you not prefer to be forced to become the guest of one who feels for you the utmost kindness, and is not without the hope of one day becoming allied to your family, than be forced to appear before General Howe, upon a charge so grave as that of being a rebel spy?"

"I do not know that I fully understand you."

"I received orders to arrest you. I was compelled to do so."

"Were you not equally compelled to deliver me over to your superiors after that arrest? You hesitate, Captain Blaisdell."

"I am equally bound to do it. But I shall not; for this breach of duty I shall lose all I possess in the world; I shall be driven from the service in disgrace, without doubt."

"And why do you make so great a sacrifice?"

"Because I love your daughter, Laura. I could not bear that she should be charged with crime, and I determined to save her. Then I pictured to myself what her feelings would be when the knowledge of her mother's fate came to her ears, and for her sake, I determined to save both."

"You have my thanks," said Mrs. Meredith, as she extended her hand.

"Don't you bel'ave a word he sez," whispered Biddy. "He's lyin' like the very imp, that he is!"

"Bridget," said the captain, "you may go into the kitchen."

"I know I may, sur. But, if ye pl'aze, I'd jist as l'ave sthay here."

"Go into the kitchen!"

This was spoken in a tone not to be mistaken, and the woman obeyed.

"And now, Mrs. Meredith, I have something more to tell you. It was by the planning of Harvey Osgood, that the picket-guard was cap-

tured, together with yourself. Osgood is a traitor!"

"That is a serious charge for you to make, unless you know it to be true."

"I will bring you the proof in two hours, which shall be no less than his own handwriting. Will that suffice?"

"If I see aught to prove his guilt, he shall at once be discarded."

"He is discarded now. I have convinced Laura of his falsehood, and she has sworn to be my wife if I will save you and her brother. No, she did not speak of her brother, I believe."

"Where is my daughter?"

"She is perfectly safe. My first duty will be in the city—that is, to save your son. My next, to restore you to your daughter, and then the marriage ceremony shall be performed, and together we will seek some place of safety until these troubles are at an end."

"Sir, you speak like a man who sincerely feels that which he speaks. If my child has, without force, consented to become yours, you shall have a mother's blessing with her. But, should there be any mistake with regard to Lieutenant Osgood, I believe she will cling to him."

The Briton knelt at her side, took her hand, and pressed it respectfully to his lips, and then left the house.

"There is some mistake with regard to Osgood; but I do not think it will be easily discovered. My plans, when thoroughly laid, do not so easily miscarry. One more stroke, and the work is finished." So he muttered as he hurried along the walk.

Blaisdell walked rapidly through one of the fashionable thoroughfares, and at length paused before a plain but neat dwelling, which had no claims to aristocracy other than its genteel appearance. Ascending the steps, he rapped loudly at the door. For a long time there was no response, and the captain grew impatient, but continued his knocking in a most violent manner: so much so, that residents in the adjoining dwellings threw up their windows, and gazed out with considerable curiosity. It was known in the neighborhood that Mrs. Meredith, who owned and occupied the dwelling at which the captain was applying for admission, was favorable to the patriot cause. Her absence had not been noted, and the presence of a British officer at her door, and the long delay in admitting him, as well as his own persistent manner, which amounted to rudeness, aroused expectancy and interest to a considerable extent.

"Curse them, for plebeians that they are!" muttered Blaisdell; "why don't they keep their heads inside? I would like to send a shot through one of them, just to teach them civility to a British officer."

At this moment the sash above the head of the captain was thrown open, and a woolly head, and a face black as night, were thrust out.

"Wha'—wha' ye want dar', massa soger man?" were the words spoken.

"Let me in, Dinah," answered the captain.

"Couldn't t'ink ob it, massa soger man."

"And why not? Don't you know me, Dinah?"

"Oh, golly, yah! Know ye berry well, and

"dat's de berry reason I don't let ye come in. So, jis' stop dat knockin' at de door, an' go off wid yerself, massa soger man."

"Why, you are not afraid of me, are you, Dinah?"

"Don't know 'bout dat are. Ye see, I's all alone by myself, an' I don't t'ink it am altogedder propper to let gemmen come in de house whar' dar' am an unprotected female like dis chile. Yah! yah!"

A burst of laughter from the adjoining dwellings followed this, and Blaisdell, finding himself the center of attraction and ridicule, grew excessively irritated. He did not dare to explain anything to the negress, lest some loyal person might be within hearing and report his words to General Howe. He did not know what to do, and, in his passion, gave the door three or four violent kicks with his heavy riding-boot.

"Take car'—take car' what ye am about down dar', or ye'll git somethin' on yer head dat will sp'ile yer 'plexion! Take car', chile! Dinah isn't safe w'en she's got her nigger up—so jis' behabe yerself, massa soger man."

This was the signal for another laugh.

Blaisdell had now become so excited that he could scarcely contain himself, and he shouted:

"Open this door, in the name of the king!"

"An' who de world am de king?" asked Dinah. "Some oder soger, I s'pose, w'at swears, an' wears red-flannel outside his wesket?"

By this time some dozen or more urchins, attracted by the unusual noise, had gathered in the street in front of the dwelling. They soon became satisfied what the trouble was, and, notwithstanding the awe felt for a British uniform, they set up a series of treble yells, more significant than musical.

"Don't let him in, cuffy!" cried one. "He's only a bossifer with too much rum in his head!"

"Guess he's come a-courtin'!" chimed in another. "Give him a taste of your leather lips!"

"Bah! bah! black sheep!" put in a third. "Give him some wool!"

"Douse him with water!" yelled a fourth. "Spankin' dirty water as ye've got!"

One or two of the little persecutors ventured to throw dirt at the discomfited officer, and then would scamper off like a flock of birds, screaming in very glee, whenever the captain made any movement which indicated an intention of pursuing them. Then, again, they would return to the street. All this comedy was enjoyed hugely by the lookers-on, who, at every sally of the tormentors, almost convulsed themselves with laughter. As for the negress, she remained at the window, grinning in the most aggravating manner, nor was she sparing of her words of advice and threats.

But the case was becoming desperate. Blaisdell could not endure this ridicule. He dared not leave the steps and walk down the street, lest the boys should follow him with their jeers. Determined, at all hazards, to gain admission, he finally said:

"Dinah, the life of your mistress is in danger, and she has sent me here to give you instructions how to act."

"Don't belebe ye. Go 'way. No more truf

in you red-coats dan in de old bellowses. Go 'way, soger man!"

"Dinah, I tell you that your mistress has been arrested as a spy, and will be executed to-morrow; and so will Master Frank, unless something can be done to save them. They have sent me here on an important mission."

The negress had little idea what the word "spy" signified, but she *did* know that her mistress was in constant fear of some trouble; therefore she bounded to the lower hall, opened the front door and admitted the Briton without hesitancy.

"I have a great mind to strangle you, you she imp of darkness!" growled the captain, as he entered.

"Look a-beah, Massa Cap'n, paws off. If ye isn't 'spectful, I'll call in dem chil'en, or, if ye don't like *dat*, I'll jis' run ye t'rough wid a shobel, that I will, if ye gits my nigger up. So jis' behabe yerself!"

This sufficed to quiet Blaisdell. He had important matters before him and he wished the assistance of Dinah; therefore he said:

"Well, well; no matter. It was *very* annoying; but I will forgive you, and we will be friends. I wish to talk to you about your mistress. Come with me into the library."

"Yah, Massa Cap'n. Dat's de bes' place to confab 'pon de matter."

Blaisdell led the way, and as soon as he had seated himself said:

"Dinah, your mistress is sentenced to be hanged to-morrow!"

"Oh, de good Lord sabe us! To be hanged—a woman, too! Lord, but you is a pretty set, isn't ye? Oh, de Lord—de Lord!" and Dinah's face expressed heartfelt agony.

"The good Lord won't interfere, Dinah; but, perhaps I can save her."

"Oh, sabe her, Massa Cap'n, sabe her, an' I'll lub ye all my life!" and the negress threw her arms around the captain's neck in an imploring manner. The Briton didn't appear so relish this demonstration, for he sprung to his feet, shook off the embrace, and shuddered as if he had been infolded in the coils of a snake. But he soon gained his wonted composure and continued:

"Dinah, I cannot save her alone; but I am going to write to Washington, and have him bring up his army and rescue her. Mrs. Meredith requested me to address the letter to Harvey Osgood—"

"Dat's de young missus's luber."

"Yes. But she had forgotten just how the letter must be directed. She told me to come here and you would get me some letters which Mr. Osgood had written to Laura, and I could find out by them how to direct."

"Well, Massa Cap'n, I don't 'zactly comprehenshun wha' ye mean; but ye is 'gwine to sabe missus—is dat yer honorable Christian purpose?"

"I am going to try to save your mistress—that's my purpose."

"An' ye wants the young missus's letters for to complete your Christian purpose?"

"Yes. I am directed to obtain them."

"Is ye 'gwine to tuck 'em away wid ye?"

"No. I am merely going to *look* at them,

and then write to Washington for help. I will do it all here."

The negress went to a book-case, opened a drawer, and drew forth a small package of letters, which she handed to Blaisdell. He seized and examined them eagerly, and at length appeared to find just what he wanted, for a smile lit up his face as he drew the document from the bundle and read it with great care. Then, taking up a pen, he wrote a few lines upon a blank sheet, and compared it with the letter. He shook his head as if dissatisfied, and threw the paper upon the floor. Then he wrote upon another slip; but, although he appeared better satisfied, he took up a third blank leaf and wrote upon it with great care, as if endeavoring to execute it in a certain style. This time he appeared to be satisfied, and threw the three slips aside. He did not observe that Dinah picked them up and put them in her pocket.

Blaisdell then, with every attention to his work, wrote a letter. After he had finished it, he wrapped it in a separate sheet and directed it: *GEORGE WASHINGTON, Major-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Army, Valley Forge.*

When he looked up, he found Dinah bending over his shoulder, with her eyes fixed upon the superscription.

"Can you read, Dinah?" asked the captain.

"No, massa. But dat looks like de way missus write on her letters. Let me see 'em."

Dinah reached forth her hand for the document, and in doing so, knocked over the inkstand, and the fluid ran across one corner of the folded letter, making, however, but a small blot.

"Yah! yah!" laughed the wench, "dat is my direcshuns. Look jis' like a nigger's work—black as a kettle."

Blaisdell gave no heed to this, but drew some papers from his own pocket, opened them, and spread them upon the table before him.

"I golly! De chickens mus' hab been walkin' on dat yar paper. It am checkered, an' crost, an' blotted all ober."

The captain appeared to be too intent upon his writing to heed the negress. He wrote upon the top of the sheet a few lines, then upon the bottom and sides, and then lines and single words in every direction. Each line and word was compared with the letter he found in the package. At length he appeared to have finished his task, for he carefully folded these papers and addressed them as the first. Then, rising from his seat, he exclaimed:

"That is perfect—that will fix the business!"

"Wha' is it, Massa Cap'n?"

"The letters for Wash—for Osgood."

"An' will he come an' save missus, an' dear young missus, an, Massa Frank?"

"Yes. I hope so."

Blaisdell left the house. The boys had disappeared, and he passed on without molestation toward the Capitol.

"The first thing will be to prepare a pass for my servant and send him across the river on an errand for me. Once upon the other side, he will have no trouble in reaching the outer picket line of the rebels. These papers shall be in the

hands of Washington to-night." These were his mental orders of proceeding.

After Blaisdell had left the house, the negress returned to the library and drew the bits of paper which the captain had written upon, and then thrown aside, from her pocket. She scrutinized them closely, turning them over and over, but her face wore a puzzled look. At length she said:

"De eddicashum ob dis chile am berry much neglected. But it would take de berry Old Nick to make out dese hard words. Perhaps little Lucy can do it."

Dinah went into the back yard, and opened a gate communicating with the place adjoining. She called:

"Lucy! Little Lucy!"

A little girl, perhaps twelve years of age, who was apparently a resident of the next dwelling, answered the summons, and accompanied the negress into the library. Dinah handed her the first slip of paper, saying:

"Read dat, chile, if ye ken."

The little girl took the paper and read:

"CAMP VALLEY FORGE, }
"Dec. 17th, 1777."

"DEAR GENERAL:—

"In reply to yours, I would state that I always have been loyal. I came here for a double purpose. I accept with gratitude the commission. The plans I will send—curse it!"

The little girl looked up in surprise.

"That's a funny way to finish a letter. He swears, don't he?"

"Now read dis 'un, chile." The darky handed her a second slip.

The little girl took the paper, and after examining it, said:

"Why, here are two great big B's. And there is B-l-a-i-s-d-e-l—that spells Blaisdell."

"Yeh! Dat was de name ob de man dat wrote it. But, honey chile, wha' does the two big B's mean?"

"Why, they look just like the marks I make when my pen is not very good, and I am trying it. Only I always make big L's because my name is Lucy. I guess he was clearing out his pen so that it would make a good mark."

"Is dat all dat's on de paper, chile?"

"No. Why it's just like the other one, only the swearing ain't there, and at the end of it there is a great lot of little m's."

"Wha' does dem mean?"

"Well, Dinah, when I go to write a letter, and I don't get it to suit me, I scribble a lot of big L's and little l's and m's, or a long string of little marks, which look like them, but don't mean exactly anything. I suppose that's just what the gentleman meant that wrote this."

"De Lord bress de chile. Wha' a great t'ing it am to hab sich a splendiferous eddicashum! Now, chile, tell me wha' dis 'ere odder paper say, an' I won't bodder ye no more."

Lucy took the paper as before. She gave it but a glance, and then added:

"The words are just like all the rest, only there ain't no swearin', or big B's or little m's, and the writing is not the same."

"It was all wrote by the same man," said Dinah.

"Was it? Let me see."

The little girl compared the three papers carefully, and shook her head as if in doubt. Then her eyes fell upon the letter which Blaisdell had drawn from the packet, and which lay open before her. She took it up and compared it with the third slip, saying:

"The writing is more like this letter. And see, on this letter there are two big *B*'s and the letters, B-l-a-i-s. He don't spell his name out in full, here."

Dinah took the letter and the slips, and folded them carefully together. She placed them in her pocket, saying:

"De good Lord only knows what it all means, but I's gwan' to keep dese anyhow, till de missus cum', an' den see if it can be unrabbled. I 'spec' it am not altogedder right, but mus' wait an' see. Rader guess ole Dinah been in bad company dis day—dat's w'at's de mistake."

The old darky was aroused by a rap at the front door. She opened it, and Frank Meredith entered.

"Oh! de Lord—de Lord—is ye safe, chile—is ye safe?" sobbed Dinah, as she caressed her young master, whom she had not seen for so long a time.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRISON-HULK ESCAPE.

WHEN Frank and Dan Disbrow found themselves in the open street, after having been released by Blaisdell, they paused for a time to consider how it was best to act. They knew where their friends had been taken, but they could do nothing for them until night came on. Even then they could not hope to accomplish much without further assistance. It was therefore decided that Frank should visit his home, to ascertain if his mother and sister were there, and if they were not, to devote the entire day in searching for them. Dan was to find as many of his friends as possible, and prepare for a night's work. They were to meet opposite the old prison hulk soon after dark, to decide if anything could be done. Frank took his way to his mother's house, and was, ere long, clasped to Dinah's motherly bosom.

He could learn nothing satisfactory to his own mind from the negress, but the more he thought of the matter, the more he felt convinced that his mother must be a prisoner at some place where Blaisdell could have the especial charge of her, and that Laura had been constrained to consent to marry the villain to save her life; hence he feared that the marriage would take place even before his mother was released. These thoughts filled his heart with agony, for he felt that he would sooner die than that his sister should make so great a sacrifice. Still, if this *was* the *only* way to save his mother, it must be done.

Of the strips of paper which Dinah showed him, he could make nothing. At first he was led to believe that Blaisdell had written to Washington, offering to serve in his army, and that this action was induced from the fact that the family into which he was about to marry was identified with the interests of the patriot army. But then the slips bore date at Valley Forge. Still, it *might* be a blind.

The day passed slowly away, and the patriot

boy failed to gain any intelligence of those he loved so dearly. Night came, and he took his way toward the point where he had promised to meet the rangers. He arrived at the spot, but not a man was visible. Out over the water, or rather over the ice, he could just distinguish the black outlines of the old hulk, where his friends were confined. He was disquieted, and was unable to account for the state of affairs, when he was startled by a hand being laid upon his shoulder.

"Young man, you should be more watchful. Keep your eyes about you while you are in this city." It was Dan who spoke.

"I confess I was absorbed in what I deemed to be a bad case," replied Frank.

"Thinking about your mother?"

"Yes, and my poor sister, and of all our friends in British hands."

"Your mother and sister are both safe."

"Tell me where, my friend?"

"You would fly to them at once, I suppose?"

"Of course I should; so tell me where they are!"

"And you would leave your friends in that old hulk to die?"

"I will return to their assistance after I have seen my mother and Laura, and know that *they* do not require help, first."

"You are a brave boy. Quite right. Always give your mother the first consideration. But your relatives are perfectly safe, and as soon as we rescue our friends here, we shall return to them. We shall want every man here, to-night, for the work in hand will demand all our help."

"Well, I will remain. But you will at least tell me where mother and Laura are?"

"Certainly. You have heard of Sim Morris?"

"Yes, very often."

"Ever seen him?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Here, Sim!" called Dan, and that worthy came forward.

"Sim, tell Mr. Meredith, here, about his mother."

"I will, sure. She's the likeliest woman in America, bedad, savin' me pwn wife, which is Bridget, to be sure."

"No, no!" cried Frank, with some impatience, "tell me *where* she is."

"In my house, sure."

"How came she there?"

"Sure an' Blaisdell brought her there, the blackguard."

"Frank," exclaimed Dan, "Sim is in the service of Blaisdell, that precious rascal thinking him true. He is known to the captain as Mike Duggan. Your mother is only awaiting our instructions how to act, and, if I am not mistaken, we will all be safe in Washington's camp before to-morrow night."

"I rejoice at the prospect. But I can not go with you, Dan."

"Why not, my young lark?"

"I have pledged my word to return and give myself up to General Howe, or to join their cause and forego my own."

"You made no such pledge, Frank."

"Ay, but I did."

"And I say you did not. You pledged yourself that, *after* the marriage of Blaisdell with

your sister, you would come back. And, as I take it, tho marriage will never take place; therefore you never will be compelled to return."

"This is a mere quibble. But where is Laura?"

"At the house of Old Nancy, upon the opposite side of the river. She is safe, so now to work."

"What is your plan?" asked Frank.

"You shall soon see what a general I am at planning a campaign," smiled Dan. "Sim, I want you to go down the river some distance. Then gradually work your way up toward the old hulk. You must creep along upon your hands and knees, but be careful and not come within range of the sentinel's musket. I want you to attract the attention of the guard by your antics. Bob up and down; roll over in the snow. They will think you are a hog or a dog, or something else. All I want is to have the attention of the guard drawn in that direction, so that we can come up from the other side. They haven't kept any of our boys on that old hulk before, so they are not very careful, any way."

"All right," replied Sim, as he started off. "Just consider me a dog wid a hog's snout and a fish's tail, sure."

"Come, Frank," and Dan took the opposite direction.

"Are you armed?" asked Dan.

"Not even a knife."

"Then take this. You may need it to defend yourself"—giving him an ugly-looking knife.

Frank took the weapon and the two friends proceeded very cautiously. Presently Dan stepped upon the ice and bent his course toward the island. When they reached its shore Frank asked:

"How many of the boys are here?"

"Twenty, if Nance has done his duty. Nance is one on 'em, I tell you!"

"Who gives directions? Yourself, I suppose."

"No; Captain Brand is chief cook of that vessel, and some mighty hot stuff he'll brew to-night, I'm a-thinkin'."

"Who did you say? Captain Brand, the famous scout?"

"Exactly, an' nothin' surer."

"Is he on the island now?"

"Yes. You will see him in jist about five minutes, if you keep your eyes peeled."

"That I will you may be assured, for I want to see this remarkable man. It has always been a mystery to me how Brand has escaped detection so long. His work is dangerous in the extreme, yet he pursues it with apparent immunity, even where you rangers would not dare to venture."

"The mystery will be solved to you to-night. Did you eat that apple the old woman gave you at the door of the Capitol this morning?"

"No. I have not thought of it since."

"If you had, you would have found within it a bit of paper."

"Ah! then she was one of us?"

"Upon the paper was written words, which would have informed you of the safety of your sister. Old Nancy had seen her, early as it was. But here we are."

In a rude shed, which had been erected as a

kind of shelter for fishermen during the season, was heard the sound of voices. They grew silent. Dan came up, at once, and entered as one familiar with the place, saying as he did so:

"It's all right. Frank is here, and Sim has gone down on the ice. I think we can move in half an hour. The moon will be down by that time."

"Too soon," exclaimed one of the party.

"Not a bit," answered Old Nancy. "I sold apples on that old hulk to-day, and, I tell you, there ain't twenty men upon it, besides the prisoners, and two-thirds of them are asleep or drunk half the time. I have agreed to bring them over another supply of whisky, as soon as it is fairly dark, and I can do it with safety. They will be expecting me soon. Gad, the petticoats are convenient things, sometimes; but, confound me, if I should like to wear them always! Young man, how did you like the apple I gave you this morning?"

"I thought it was an old woman who gave me the apple this morning; but I'll be hanged if your voice sounds like that of a seventy-year old."

There was a general laugh throughout the party, and the person addressed added:

"I see you are not up in the scouting business."

"Who are you?" asked Frank, not disguising his astonishment.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I hardly know. I've been so many different persons, male and female, it's hard to decide just who I am. I was once Captain Brand—a long time ago, however; but I hope to become myself again, one of these days, when Washington can spare Old Nancy."

"Captain Brand in petticoats," exclaimed Frank, laughing in spite of himself.

"No. Captain Brand, when he wore the Continental uniform; but, latterly, I've been Old Nancy, the apple-vender; and all the time that I could spare from the city and my trade, I have kept a little post-office for Washington, just over the Schuylkill, in a log-cabin."

"Is my sister at your cabin?" asked Frank.

"Well, I must say, young man, that I received a choice little parcel of goods early this morning, from one Captain Blaisdell. But I fancied it didn't belong to him, but had been stolen from Lieutenant Osgood, of the patriot army. So I consented to keep her as my ward."

"You have not left her at your cabin alone?" exclaimed the latter, with considerable earnestness.

"Oh! she's watched. But I must dress and be off."

Old Nancy soon left the hut. She walked out upon the ice, and down toward the hulk. The remainder of the party followed, but took good care to keep themselves concealed by the thick evergreens and small trees with which the island was covered. To have exposed even one of their persons would have been to arrest the guard's attention in the wrong direction, at the wrong moment.

They finally reached a point within a few yards of the hulk's stern, and listened. The voice of Nancy was distinctly heard, but its tones were so changed that none but the initiated would recognize it.

"Is that you?" called the guard.

"Yes, it's me, in course. What a question to ax."

"Well, *who* is it? Give yer name."

"Old Nancy, trying to turn an honest penny."

"Have you got it?"

"The whisky?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I've got it, an' somethin' else, I reckon. I guess I knows my trade."

"Well, come aboard and show your wares, old gal."

"Sure there ain't no officers on board that will take my truck away from me?"

"Not an officer here. The jolly dogs find better quarters ashore, and leave guard duty to us poor fools."

"And you will surely pay me?"

"Of course we will. Come, be in a hurry. I am as dry as a salt-barrel, and as eager for some old rye as an empty leech is for a boy's blood."

Nancy ascended the steps which led to the deck of the hulk, and then said to the guard:

"Turn your back, now, while I take the jewels from their place of concealment." Then half a dozen bottles were produced. The guard took them, and at once went into the cabin. He had scarcely disappeared, when the other and only sentinel remaining on deck, said:

"I say, old Nancy, are your eyes good?"

"Putty good, for an old woman," replied Nancy. "Why?"

"Come here, and see if you can tell me what kind of an animal that is on the ice, down yonder."

Nancy came forward, as requested, but, seizing a musket from the deck-rack as she passed, came up behind him, and, saying "Where is it?" struck him a blow upon the head which rendered him senseless. Quick as possible, she ran back to the entrance of the cabin, and called in a loud voice:

"Quick! friends, quick!"

The soldier who had received the whisky of the supposed old woman, had been busy with his own comrades, helping themselves. He heard the voice, and, supposing it referred to himself and companions, replied:

"We'll bring you the money in a few moments, old woman. Just you keep Jim company on guard, and—" here he gobbled down more whisky.

The flow of the spirit was arrested, however, quite effectually, and all in the cabin looked at each other in astonishment and alarm, for overhead was heard the tramping of the rangers as they came pouring over the sides of the vessel. The British guards paused but a moment, and then attempted to gain the deck; but Captain Brand, now in his true character, presented the muzzle of his piece down the companionway, exclaiming:

"We don't wish to harm any of you. We have merely come after the prisoners who were brought here this morning. There are twenty of us here, fully armed, and we have the upper hand, and mean to keep it. If you submit quietly, all will be well. If not, we shall make short shrift of the whole comboodle."

"That's the talk," chimed in Dan. "I'd like a Britisher for supper."

There appeared to be a short consultation below, and then one of the soldiers asked:

"What will you do with us if we yield?"

"Simply tie you, so that you cannot give the alarm before morning."

"Then we will surrender, as there seems no alternative."

"Then come up two at a time; and remember, the first attempt to give any alarm will be the death of him who makes it."

Two by two the men were brought from the cabin and bound, until the last man was secured.

"What is your purpose now?" asked one of the prisoners.

"To release our men. Where are they?"

"In the hold below."

"And are the hatches closed?"

"Yes; and all is dark below."

"Have our men no fire?"

"Neither beds, nor fire, nor lights!"

"Monsters! And by whose order is this so?"

"The provost-marshal's," replied the sergeant in command. "I would have given them both bed and fire if I had dared; but I should have been shot or flogged if I had done anything of the kind."

"Those words have saved you from sharing the same fate that was meted out to our men. Quick, boys; take off the hatches."

It was soon done, and our friends of the morning were delighted to find themselves at liberty and in the company of congenial spirits. The meeting between Dan and his chief was characteristic.

"How are you, Ezekiel, my daddy?"

"Clever! How are you, Daniel, my son?"

"Dubious! Give us yer fist."

And seizing both the hand and hook of the ranger-in-chief, Dan shook them heartily.

"Come aloft, old boy, out of this British parlor. Whew! it smells *some*, I swow. Zeke, somebody in here has got bad breath, or I'm a jew's-harp."

"Git out, Dan; you're always grumblin' at somethin'. You'd find some fault with your granddaddy's way o' dying, I s'pose."

"Never had such a thing, as I knows on, old feller; though I does remember that there is a tomb-stun' in the old Pottsville churchyard as says somethin' about Career Absalom Disbrow, who died, covered with respect, at the age of one hundred and three. But, blame my skin, ef I believe the stun'!"

And thus the two men chatted, as they made their way to the deck. Two brothers could not have been more united—heart and hand.

The British prisoners having been taken into the cabin, and made secure, Captain Brand said to them:

"Tell your heartless provost-marshal that if he was here, we would retaliate by hanging him. But we do not wish to wreak vengeance upon his poor tools and slaves. I should like to have him pass but a single night in that ice-hole and I think it would teach him mercy toward others. But, come, boys, here is some fine stuff. Let us drink. I'll give you the toast: 'Washington and his Army.'"

"Quick, boys, quick!" cried Sim, springing

into the cabin. "The red-coats are coming across the ice in a perfect swarm, and at a run. They will be here in a minute."

The patriots did not wait for further information, but sprung to the deck. Surely enough, not twenty rods distant came a company of not less than one hundred British infantry.

"Boys," exclaimed Brand, speaking in a quick but cool tone, "spring over the side of the vessel and make the best of your way to the Jersey shore. Then take the circuit of Camden village and the city and join me at the earliest possible moment at Miller's farm, the other side of the Schuylkill."

Quickly and silently the brave men sprung from the vessel, and swiftly ran for the opposite shore, covered by the darkness.

They had scarcely disappeared, however, before the British soldiers came dashing up the steps, and leaped upon the deck of the vessel. They caught a glimpse of the fugitives, while they were yet within shot, and had it not been for the point of the island which intervened, they might have sent a volley into their midst with some effect.

As it was, the infuriated commander cried:

"Fire upon them—fire upon the rebel dogs!"

A volley was given, but of course without effect. Its echoes rolled over the hills and up and down the broad Delaware and then all was silent.

"Are we pursued?" asked one of Davis's party, as the ranger came up, having fallen behind for observation.

"I think not. We can all remain together. That volley has been heard far and near, and every post within a circuit of five miles will be on the alert. We had better go down the river and cross below, and so around the city. It is a long journey on a cold night like this, boys, but it's the only course. So push on."

The party kept on together; but, as the distance was far, and they had to avoid encounters with scouting-parties, it was late in the morning before they arrived at the Miller farm.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GOOD CASE AND A HARD RESULT.

To return to Lieutenant Harvey Osgood.

After his examination before the commanding-general, he returned to his own tent and threw himself upon his rude bed, if bed it could be called. For a long time he mused. He thought over his past services, and tried to call to mind any willful breach of duty. He endeavored to examine his own heart. Two loves were there, earthly, and two heavenly. Of earth, his country and his affianced Laura; of heavenly, his God and those earthly parents who were marshaled among his hosts. With thoughts like these, he fell into a quiet sleep.

The sun was shining brightly when he awoke. He started, and gazed around him. Standing by his side was the fellow, Johnson, who had made an attempt to swear his life away the day before. Osgood regarded him for a moment, and then asked:

"What do you want here, fellow! Did you come to stab me while I was sleeping? Who are you anyhow—a knave or a spy?"

"Oh! there's no occasion to be so cranky. I

only told the truth, or what I thought to be the truth; but, as the general thinks it's all right, I suppose it must be, and I ax yer pardon." Then handing the lieutenant a folded paper, he said:

"There's something the general sent ye." Handing the prisoner a sealed envelope, he left the tent.

Osgood took the paper, opened it, and glanced at its contents. He sprung to his feet with an exclamation of joy. Then he read aloud:

"Headquarters Continental Army,
Valley Forge, Jan. 3d, 1777.

"To HARVEY OSGOOD,

Lieutenant, Co. B., 4th N. J. C. I.:—

"The General-Commanding feels the deepest regret at the unfortunate circumstance which compelled him to order the examination of an officer whom he believes to be faithful and patriotic. As an atonement for the wrong (not intended) done a brave officer, the General-Commanding hereby grants to Lieutenant Osgood a leave for a space of one week, that he may use all diligence to ascertain the fate of those friends so dear to him.

"(Signed) GEORGE WASHINGTON,

Maj.-Gen. and Commander-in-Chief.

"By the A. A. General."

Osgood was nearly beside himself with joy. Here was an opportunity to redeem, to some extent, the wrong he had committed by his thoughtlessness. Perhaps he might devise some plan to rescue his friends! He could not decide how it was to be done, but he was *free*, and that was the first step toward the accomplishment of his purposes.

"I will first proceed to the house of my friend Miller," he said, "where I can thoroughly disguise myself, and then enter Philadelphia. I must ascertain where my friends have been conveyed, and, if possible, secure the release of the rangers. They will be of great assistance. But that, I fear, will be a very difficult task. They can not escape recognition by Howe. If they are recognized they certainly will be hung, at once, as spies. And all from my neglect! Poor fellows! They have braved dangers a hundred times, but, so long as they were on the lookout for themselves, they passed safely through. But, when they depended upon me, and were in anticipation of no trouble, they were seized. If they perish, I shall almost feel as if their blood was upon my hands. And what will be the fate of Laura and her mother? I shudder to think of it. Now for action."

Osgood left his tent, and took his way toward the outpost where the night capture had been made. Passing through the camp he met the commander-in-chief, who was engaged in conversation with some of his officers. Osgood did not wish to interrupt him, but simply saluted, saying:

"General, my actions shall speak my thanks."

The commander smiled, gave a nod of approbation, and the lieutenant, with a heart full of gratitude and hope, passed on.

Since the surprise and capture of the post, the picket had been doubled and the strictest orders given. Osgood was therefore compelled to show his pass before leaving the lines. He observed Johnson standing near him as he approached the outer post, and thought there was

something suspicious and malicious in his eyes. But he deemed it nothing more than natural hatred which a man entertained for the person whom he had endeavored to ruin, and gave no heed to the look, but passed on.

Taking the beaten track over which the cattle-drove had passed, he found little difficulty in making rapid progress. He had accomplished about one-half the distance between camp and Miller's, when he saw a party of horsemen approaching from the direction of the patriot camp. These he at once recognized as his own comrades in arms. As they came up, Osgood exclaimed:

"Well, boys, what's up now?"

"Where are you going, Lieutenant Osgood?"

"It is my ultimate intention to go to Philadelphia."

"Have you a leave of absence from the commander?"

"I have. Why do you ask? I showed it to the picket-guard as I left camp."

"So the general was informed. Will you permit me to see it?"

"Certainly. Here it is. But, what do you mean by 'so the general was informed'?"

The officer took the paper and examined it closely. He then said:

"Lieutenant Osgood, the writing of this leave very much resembles your own, but the signature of the general is almost perfect."

"Almost perfect!" cried Osgood. "In heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"That that paper is a forgery, and that we have been sent to arrest you and bring you back to camp."

"Oh! my God!" groaned Osgood. "Caught! Deceived! Ruined! Fool that I was, why did I receive it from *such* hands, without at once ascertaining if it was genuine or not?"

"From *such* hands!" echoed the officer. "What do you mean?"

"That paper was handed to me by Philip Johnson, purporting to come from Washington's own hands. I am sure I never suspected it of being a forgery."

"Johnson could not, certainly, write such a hand as that. But come. You must return with us. It is my duty to place you in irons; yet, as I have not been positively ordered so to do, I will not."

Poor Osgood was mounted upon a spare horse, and the party beaded for camp. Oh, what a change in matters a few moments had wrought.

He was nearing Philadelphia, happy in the thought that he might be able to do something for his friends, and in bright anticipations of again meeting the object of his heart's devotion; and happy, too, that he enjoyed the confidence of his general to such an extent, that he could even overlook so great a breach of discipline as had been committed.

But, now, he was returning, again a prisoner, and in a more embarrassing position than his former neglect had brought upon him! He had a forged paper in his possession. Would it not be thought that he was deserting, or perhaps even going over to the enemy? But, how did Johnson become possessed of the paper? Surely, one so utterly ignorant as he appeared to be, could not perform such a piece of work! He

concluded that he must have some bitter and secret foe in camp, but he could not conjecture who it could be.

At length they reached the picket-line.

The news that Osgood had deserted to avoid a trial as a traitor—that he had forged a pass to enable him to leave the camp, and that it was his intention to go back to the British Army, *now that he was found out*, had spread rapidly throughout the army. Johnson made himself very officious and prominent in declaring what *should* be the sentence of such a traitor. Therefore, when the party arrived, Osgood was received with hisses, groans and anathemas of every description. He moaned in the very agony of soul, but said nothing, and his bearing was that of dignity, which was mistaken by many for insolence or bravado.

The prisoner was conducted to the guard-house, and immediately placed in irons. Here he was left alone to his reflections. What were to be the charges made against him? Certainly they would be of a serious nature. First, breach of duty—then a false, perhaps purposely forged pass—then an attempt to reach the British lines; it all *looked* bad!

He spoke to the guard who was pacing in front of his door, but that person only gave him a glance of anger, and did not reply. Several times those with whom he had been intimate passed, and upon their faces rested either a look of contempt or reproach. On not one face did he detect pity or the interest of a well-wisher.

There are circumstances under which a sensitive person can live an age in a single hour—when a lifetime of misery is condensed in the sufferings of a moment. Such was the case with Harvey Osgood, in the interval between his arrest and that in which he was brought forth for trial. He read in every circumstance *design*—premeditated, subtle and overwhelming design to destroy him. Who *could* be his enemy? Certainly none of his comrades in arms, for none would envy him his arduous duties that they should seek for his rank. Had he a secret enemy on anybody else's account? He thought long and seriously. Laura, his beloved, might have arrested attention; but, as she had not been in the camp until that fatal evening, it was impossible that any of the Continental gallants could have become envious of the young lieutenant. Who, then, *was* the man at the bottom of the scheme? Not Johnson, for he was too evidently ignorant to play so desperate a game; but that he was some person's agent in the matter, was clear. He would watch and wait; but, the ways of military justice are swift, and the gallows might do its hideous work ere the truth could be known.

It was about three o'clock of the same day that Osgood was conducted from the guard-house to the place where his trial was to take place. As he entered, he glanced hastily around him, but each eye was cold, and each lip scornful. He felt that his fate was sealed. Pity, there was none; and if evidence could be adduced which could impeach his honor, he must fail of extrication from the web around him. He sunk into a seat, and despite a desperate effort to appear calm, he trembled violently, and bowed his head upon his hands,

There was a short delay, a rustling of papers, and then a stern voice exclaimed:

"Harvey Osgood, stand up."

He obeyed—his resolution and sense of injury giving him strength for the crisis.

"You are charged with being a spy and a traitor! What is your plea to this charge? Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" came the emphatic reply.

"The charge against you, you have heard, and have made your plea. I will now read to you the specifications!"

"First specification—That on or about the 27th day of December, in the year of our Lord 1777, you did secretly hold treasonable converse with one of the enemies of your country, and an emissary of the King of Great Britain, and that you then and there concocted a plot to deliver up such patriot soldiers as were under your command! To the first specification what is your plea? Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!"

"Second specification—That on or about the same date, and at the same time and place, you did place in the hands of said enemy or emissary, documents, among which were plans of the position of the Continental Army, now in camp at Valley Forge. To this second specification, what is your plea?"

"Not guilty!"

"Third specification—That you did forge the name of the commanding-general to a paper setting forth that you had permission to absent yourself for the term of one week from your command and from camp. And that the motive of this forgery was to enable you to pass the lines of this army, and to reach the city of Philadelphia. What is your plea to this third specification?"

"Not guilty!"

"You are now to be tried upon the foregoing charges and specifications. I am not to act as your advocate, but to conduct the trial. I am bound to give you the benefit of any favor that can, in justice, be extended."

The first witness called was Johnson, who swore that he was standing near the outer picket-post upon the Philadelphia road about nine o'clock that morning, when he saw Lieutenant Osgood approaching. He saw him hand to the guard a paper which the latter read and then returned. When Osgood had passed on, he (Johnson) questioned the guard as to the contents of the paper, and that it was a leave of absence, signed by Washington. He (Johnson) did not think it all right, and so he mentioned the fact to one of the general's aids. This was all he knew of the matter.

The second witness was the picket-guard, who swore to having examined the leave, and permitted Osgood to pass the lines upon the strength of it. He identified the paper shown as being the one presented by Osgood.

The third witness was the officer who had arrested Osgood while on his way to Philadelphia. The witness identified the paper then in court as the one he had received from Osgood.

Johnson was then recalled, and his testimony taken with regard to the meeting of Osgood and a stranger upon the hill beyond the camp, and the transfer of papers from the hands of the for-

mer to those of the latter. Osgood questioned the scoundrel closely, but he lied so decidedly and so clearly, that the prisoner's guilt only appeared the more apparent. It was then that he noticed Johnson's true character, and he exclaimed:

"I pronounce this witness an infamous liar and a low-hearted wretch, who is swearing away my life for his own, or some other assassin's purpose. He is not what he seems. I say before God, that I am utterly innocent of any of these specifications, and that, as I hope for Heaven's mercy hereafter, I believe this man is a most dangerous spy and emissary of the enemy."

Johnson only smiled and added:

"Twon't do, lieutenant. I knows ye for what ye are, and the court has had the truth."

The testimony now appeared to be complete, and those detailed upon the court-martial conferred together for a short time. At length the judge-advocate said:

"Remove the prisoner to the guard-house."

This was about being done, when an officer entered and handed the general a package of papers. He opened them, looked carefully over their contents, while a frown rested upon his face. As the prisoner was about to depart, the general said:

"Stay, Harry Osgood!"

The prisoner returned.

"Read aloud!" and the general passed the papers over to the judge-advocate. That person read as follows:

"(Private.) PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 2d, 1778.

"TO MAJ-GEN. GEORGE WASHINGTON, commanding Continental Army, Valley Forge:—

"The exigencies of war often necessitate the employment of spies and scouts; but it is not in accordance with my sense of honor or justice, knowing the fact, to permit a man holding the high position of lieutenant in your army, and enjoying your confidence, to remain unexposed and unpunished for his treachery.

"The accompanying papers were intercepted by me while on their way to General Howe. It was a breach of duty upon my part to neglect forwarding them to him, but the means by which they were obtained was so dishonorable, that I could not do it. I return them to you, with my best wishes for your personal welfare. I am, general, your ob't serv't,
"RICHARD BLAISDELL."

Paper No. 2 was next taken up and read. It was as follows:

"CAMP VALLEY FORGE, Dec. 17th, 1777.

"DEAR GENERAL:—In reply to yours, I would state that I always have been loyal. I came here for a double purpose. I accept with gratitude the commission. The plans I will send to-morrow. They are correct, and I have no doubt if a vigorous attack be made upon Valley Forge by five thousand determined men, the army of Washington can be captured or annihilated. Further information I will give on my arrival in Philadelphia. I will arrange for the capture of the picket-post on the Philadelphia side of the camp. This will lead them to expect any attack which may be made, to come from that direction, while the other and weaker side, as you will see by the accompanying plan, is the point against which the main assault should be made.
Most truly yours,

"(Signed)

HARVEY OSGOOD.

"TO MAJ-GEN. LORD HOWE,

"Commanding his Majesty's troops, Philadelphia."

Had a bolt of lightning stricken the young man, he could not have sprung to his feet quicker. The blood rushed to his face until it became a living glow, and then receded, leaving him pale as death. Great drops of perspiration started from his brow, and with a groan of agony almost unearthly, he staggered back and fell to the earth. But he did not entirely lose his consciousness.

He was raised up and placed in his seat.

Then came the examination of the plans of the camp. They were found to be correct. They contained full details of everything.

The next step was to procure the company books to which Osgood was attached, and compare the writing. They were found to be identical. The evidence was conclusive, and a more connected chain of circumstances proving treachery and crime, could not be recorded. There was but one thing more for the court to do, and that became simply a formality when the proofs of the wretched man's guilt were considered. This one thing was to pronounce the sentence of death upon the culprit—death by hanging.

Osgood was removed to the guard-house. Heavy irons were placed upon him, and a double guard over him.

On being left alone, the wretched man sat down as calmly as one in his condition could be expected to do, to review his situation. He now realized that *Blaisdell* was his evil genius—the principal in all that dreadful scheme of dishonor and murder—but the web of circumstances was so tightly woven that there was no hope. The victim must die a dishonored death.

In an hour after the court adjourned, the judge-advocate came to the guard-house. Osgood asked the question, not because he had any doubt as to what his fate would be, but from a natural desire to know the worst at once:

"Major, what is to be my fate?"

"Mr. Osgood, pens, ink and paper will be furnished you, and you can write to your friends. It will be necessary for you to do it at once. You will be waited upon this evening by the chaplain. You can speak freely to him, and he will regard your last wishes.

"As the sun sinks to rest to-morrow afternoon, you will swing from the gallows."

CHAPTER IX.

BLAISDELL'S CONSPIRACY.

AFTER *Blaisdell* had dispatched his messenger to Washington with the package of papers, he threw himself back in the arm-chair in which he was sitting, and gave himself up to thought. He mused for an hour, while he puffed away at his cigar, watching the white wreaths of smoke as they curled over his head. At length he gave utterance to his thoughts:

"It is accomplished now. She is mine, sure, for nothing stands in the way. I must visit my pretty bird to-day, and prepare her for our nuptials, for they shall take place to-morrow morning. Why should there be any delay in the matter? There must be no delay—shall be none!"

Blaisdell rung a bell, which was answered by a servant.

"Tell Chaplain Goodwin I wish to see him on especial business!"

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, and he disappeared.

In a short time after the chaplain referred to made his appearance.

"Sit down, my friend," said *Blaisdell*.

"You wished to see me, your servant tells me," said the chaplain.

"Yes; I am going to get married."

"Indeed! And who, pray, is to become the happy Mrs. *Blaisdell*?"

"Oh! an angel, of course; at least in my own estimation, and I presume no one who knows her thinks differently. But the matter may appear strange to you unless fully explained."

"Go on, sir; I am all attention."

"The lady who is my intended is the daughter of a Mrs. Meredith. The mother is a violent rebel, and of course, would object to my becoming her daughter's husband. But, as this is the only objection she could raise, of course I do not heed it. The daughter loves me, and wishes the union consummated at once. She is now in a rather singular place, but it is from her own choice. I wish to be married to-morrow morning, and then, of course, shall return at once with my bride to her mother's home. When she finds that it is too late, she will, of course, forgive us, and perhaps I can convert the mother."

"If the young lady is willing, I can't see that there can be any serious objections. Certainly no family in Philadelphia could object to Captain *Blaisdell* from any lack of social position."

"And you will be ready to accompany me to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock?"

"I will be at your service at that hour."

The chaplain left the apartment.

"So far, so good," exclaimed *Blaisdell*, as he rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "Now, to visit my bird."

He descended the broad steps of the hotel where he was stopping, and, mounting his horse, rode rapidly toward the Schuylkill. The ice being so hard, he found no difficulty in crossing, and soon reached the cabin. Dismounting, he entered.

Laura was seated by the fire, entirely alone. She was reading a book as the conspirator entered, but she dropped it, and sprung to her feet. A gratified look overspread her face, and she started forward to meet the man whom, only the day before, she had so detested.

Blaisdell took her hand, kindly, and said:

"You smile upon me, dear Laura, and it makes me happy; for it gives me hope that you will some day truly love me."

"I hope your kindness will win my love, if I am to become your wife."

"You are to become my wife, and that to-morrow morning."

"So soon!" and she started, while a death-like paleness overspread her face.

"Yes. Why should there be any delay? Every hour that intervenes, detains your dear mother in confinement."

"And have you seen my mother?"

"Yes. I saw her only a short time since."

"Did you speak of our marriage?"

"Yes. That was the one object of my interview."

"And what was her reply?"

"I informed her of the treachery of Osgood, and she believes it. I proposed a union with you, and she gave her consent, if it is *your* choice. I showed her the sacrifice it would be necessary for me to make, by releasing her; she expressed her deepest gratitude, and gave me her hand, adding, that, when we were married, we should have her blessing."

As the lover spoke, he drew the form of the gentle girl close to his breast, and encircled her with his arms.

"Where is old Nancy?" asked Blaisdell, suddenly.

"She left me, soon after your departure."

"Did she say anything especial to you, before she left?"

"Nothing. She merely warned me against any attempt to escape."

"And you did not intend to make the attempt, did you?"

"Make the attempt! Why, where could I go?"

"True, Laura. No place like home, though; and *that* you have not, until I can give it to you."

"You bring me news from my mother, but say nothing of Frank. He is a prisoner, is he not?" asked the maiden.

"No, he is free, and at large in the city."

"Free! and at large?"

"Yes. I released him."

"Oh! I owe you so much."

"Will you be ready to become my wife to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, if my mother is brought to me."

"Laura, you must permit *me* to be the guide in this matter. The moment I open the prison doors to your mother, it will be necessary for me to escape, at once, with her. You and your brother, if he will go, will accompany us. You must go as my wife. After leaving Philadelphia, it may be difficult to find the proper person to perform the ceremony. We might be compelled to defer the marriage for a long time, and this would be very embarrassing. To-day I shall arrange everything for our escape. To-morrow at half-past nine, I shall visit you, in company with our chaplain and two witnesses, when we will be married at once. Then I shall return, release your mother, and bring her to you here. Of course it will be necessary for us to take an immediate departure, as the discovery of your mother's escape would certainly follow in a few hours at most."

"But, it seems hard to be married when mother is not present."

"I know. But it is unavoidable. Your mother consents to this course. And I am sure you have sufficient confidence in me to believe that I would do everything for the best!"

"Yes; oh, yes! It is not because I doubt you. Only the proceeding appears so very unusual—so strange."

"Circumstances render it so."

"As you will. I shall be ready."

The officer left the cabin, after having pressed his lips to those of his pledged bride. Mounting his horse, he rode rapidly away.

After a time he arrived at the door of the dwelling where Mrs. Meredith was remaining. He was received in a kind manner by that lady.

"I have hope, dear lady," said Blaisdell, "that I can procure your pardon, or rather, prevent you from being brought to trial."

"You are very kind, sir, and have my warmest thanks."

"Your son I have already released. He is free to return to his comrades, and to visit you as soon as your matters are settled, which I trust will be done to-morrow."

"I thank you from my heart," exclaimed the grateful woman, as she arose and gave the man her hand.

"I trust, madam, that you will always find me considerate in your behalf. If I can procure your pardon, a few weeks will make Laura my wife, I trust. If I cannot, we must all fly from this place. In that event, I shall expect the marriage to take place *before* I start, for I sacrifice all in doing so—all but the jewel I love, which more than repays all."

"I trust matters may be arranged, and I hope for the best."

Blaisdell left the house.

"Biddy," said Mrs. Meredith, as she watched the retreating form of the captain, "I wish you would go to my residence, and tell Dinah to come to me here."

"Sure, Mrs. Meredith, an' I'll do that same." And Biddy left the house upon the message.

It was, perhaps, an hour before Biddy returned. Dinah was with her. The negress could scarcely contain her joy at meeting her mistress again. After her first ecstasies were over, she began to give the details of Blaisdell's visit to the house. Her description of the scene in front of the door was truly ridiculous. She also confirmed the fact of Frank's release, as he had visited her. But whither he had gone she did not know.

The negress then took the slips of paper from her pocket, and handed them to Mrs. Meredith, saying:

"Heah am some t'ings which dat cap'n lef' behine. Dunno as dem is ob any use, but I fatched dem along, jis' fur your conspection."

Mrs. Meredith examined the papers. It was all a mystery to her, and she could but feel that all was not right. When she took into consideration the fact of the pains Blaisdell had taken to procure the letter of Osgood to Laura, her woman's instinct told her that there was conspiracy in the matter, and her mind at once became greatly alarmed. She could, however, only await the course of events.

It was after midnight ere the anxious mother retired to rest. The negress was sleeping upon the floor, and Biddy was resting in a large arm-chair, near the fire. Mrs. Meredith retired, but not to sleep.

There were others who passed a sleepless night, but she knew it not. She could not imagine so dreadful a fate for one who had been so dear to her as Harvey Osgood, although she found her mind resting constantly upon him, in spite of her solicitude for her children. She was not a believer in presentiments, but she felt troubled.

Morning dawned. It was bright as a winter's morning could be.

It was, perhaps, half-past eight o'clock, when Sim Morris came rushing into the house, saying:

"Come—*quick!* Follow me!"

"Where should we go?" asked Mrs. Meredith.

"To your children, an' to freedom! Don't ax another question, but *come!*"

Sim and Biddy led the way; Mrs. Meredith and Dinah followed. They took their course toward the Schuylkill.

CHAPTER X.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

THE day dragged wearily along for Blaisdell. He repeated to himself a hundred times the words of the old adage, "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." He was extremely restless. Not from any especial reason; but, he felt a presentiment of evil, or, perhaps, his own guilty conscience conjured up images of terror. Conscience should have painted the world in blood, but *his* conscience was not a troublesome one. He really loved Laura as much as such a nature as his was capable of loving. Still, it was not that pure love which exalts, dignifies and ennobles—that love which is ever self-sacrificing and seeks the happiness of the object of its regard.

On account of this uneasiness, the captain was astir early on the morning of his proposed marriage-day. It was not more than eight o'clock when, in company of the chaplain and two officers as witnesses, he set out for the cabin where Laura was awaiting him.

The party were met at the door by the poor girl. A smile was resting upon her face, but it appeared to be forced. She extended her hand to the captain, and asked:

"How is it with my mother?"

"She will be with you in an hour, or two at the most."

"And is it not possible for her to be present when the ceremony takes place?"

"Do not speak of your mother before these gentlemen, Laura. If they knew all the particulars connected with this affair, they might interfere to prevent her escape. Let the ceremony proceed without question, and rely upon my doing all for my wife that I promise her before she becomes so. Are you ready?"

"Yes, as much so as my disquietude will permit."

The chaplain and the witnesses entered the cabin.

"Who giveth away this woman?" asked the good man.

"I do."

The speaker was Old Nancy. She raised herself from her bed of rags, and came tottering forward. She took the hand of Laura and passed the unresisting maiden to Blaisdell.

The ceremony went on, until the question was asked:

"If any present know aught why this marriage should not take place, let them speak now, or ever after hold their peace."

Old Nancy replied:

"Perhaps the mother of the girl might object. Look!"

Blaisdell could not conceal his surprise and annoyance as he saw the mother enter the room, accompanied by Sim and his wife, and the negress, Dinah. But, he extended his hand in a cordial manner, exclaiming:

"I rejoice that you have arrived, Mrs. Meredith. But, I had hoped to reserve to myself the pleasure of releasing you. But you are safe now."

"I think," replied Mrs. Meredith, and her manner was firm, but pleasant, "that, as I came in, the question was being asked, 'if any present had aught to say against the marriage?'"

"That question was asked," replied the chaplain.

"And how do you answer it, my child?" asked Mrs. Meredith. "Come, speak frankly."

"That my *heart* objects. But, I have given my word, and must keep it!"

"You gave your word that, if your mother was released by the influence of Captain Blaisdell, you would become his wife, did you not?"

"Yes, mother; that was the condition."

"But I have not been released through *his* influence. Therefore, you are not bound, even by that promise."

"You did not give me time to effect that release," said the captain, the blood mounting to his face.

"Could you not have brought me here with you, in order that I might witness the marriage of my child?"

Blaisdell bit his lips, and answered:

"Perhaps I might have done so. But, you are even now running a great risk."

"Have I ever been charged with being a spy? Has such a *charge* been lodged against me, with the proper authorities?"

"No. I gave in a wrong report, but that can not long shield you."

"Have I not been *your* prisoner, and that without the knowledge of your general?"

"Yes. I did it to save you."

"Then I insist that this marriage shall not take place. You have forced my child to it, under the shallow pretense that you would save her mother from death. She has saved herself. But if not, I will return and submit to trial, sooner than my child shall become the victim of such a villain!"

"Then let it be so," cried Blaisdell. "I arrest you at once upon the charge of being a spy!"

"Oh! no, no, mother! I will become his wife to save you!"

"No! I'll be blowed if you do! Whoop!" and Sim leaped into the air and whirled his shillalah in the most approved Tipperary fashion.

"Golly, Massa Capt'n, you jes' shut up, or ole Dinah will gib ye goss!"

"Stay!" said the chaplain. "I understand this lady is charged with being a spy, and that Captain Blaisdell has not only screened her, but aided her to escape. It will become necessary to arrest her, and also to call the captain to account. It will be necessary to return at once to headquarters, captain. Are you ready?"

"If I will not go?"

"Then force must be used."

"Who will force me?"

"Myself and these two officers."

"Then you will take my dead body only!"

"Don't trouble yerself," said Sim. "We're goin' to have the hul of yees!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the chaplain, in surprise.

"That you are all prisoners."

"Prisoners!"

"Yes. Every mother's son of ye. Whoop!" and Sim clapped his heels together in the air.

"And do you think to capture us?" exclaimed an officer, with a sneer. "You the only man present!"

"Don't sblander my Biddy, and he blowed to ye! She is a betther man than either of yees. An' if ye don't like Biddy, what do yees think of Captain Brand?"

"Captain Brand!" echoed the officers in astonishment.

"Yes, Captain Brand!" and the supposed old Nancy threw aside the old wig, spectacles, and dress, appearing as his veritable self.

"There are but two men against four!" cried Blaisdell, "so down with them."

"Here am anodder man!" shouted Dinah, "an' dat makes free. An' I speck free Yankees am equal to four red-coats any day."

"Upon them!" yelled Blaisdell, as he made a movement to that end himself.

"No, you don't!" cried another voice, and Zeke and Dan entered the apartment, accompanied by half a dozen others. "Huzza! for the right, boys, and into 'em like hungry dogs arter a breakfast," added Zeke, as he displayed his book threateningly.

"Betrayed!" cried Blaisdell.

"Reckon ye are. Now, jest keep quiet, for you are goin' to Valley Forge, jest as sure as preachin', in double-quick time."

Blaisdell saw that resistance would be folly. So with the others. But the chaplain had placed reliance upon the word of the captain, believing that the daughter was a willing bride, and that the mother raised her objection because she sympathized with the patriots, and could not consent to receive as her son-in-law, a person connected with the British Army. He had come with the officer simply to perform the ceremony, far from imagining that he was participating in any wrong. This he frankly stated to those who had so suddenly appeared. He also stated that the two officers had come as witnesses, simply, and upon the especial request of himself and the captain.

"If this is true," said Zeke, "and I have no doubt that it is so, you can go free. That is, if Dan and the rest of the boys don't have any objections."

"Not a bit," said Dan. "We only want this scoundrell" and he drew a rope from beneath his coat, and commenced binding the arms of Blaisdell.

"Oh, thar ain't no use kickin'," said Dan. "You'll do it a great deal better to-morrow, when you are strung up at the Valley for the crows to cawl cawl over."

"Are we free to depart?" asked the chaplain, indicating his two friends with himself.

"Yes," replied Zeke. "But, I want you to do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Wal, you see that big gun p'intin' rite at us across the river?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I want you to walk very careful along until our party get out of range. I don't care for myself, but it might damage the women, you know. Dear creatures. I should hate them hurt after all they've went through."

"We will do nothing to indicate that you are enemies, since you are generous enough to release us. And, if I were to speak just what I do feel, I should say that the captain deserves to be captured, and to receive the punishment which will follow, for the double part he has attempted to play."

"Enough said. Come on."

Zeke drew a pistol and placed it to the head of Blaisdell, saying:

"If you make the least attempt to escape, or give an alarm, you will go to your father, Old Nick, before you can draw three whiffs of heaven's air. Remember!"

Blaisdell was taken from the house by Zeke and Dan. Laura and Dinah followed. The others determined to remain behind for a short time, in order not to attract attention by so large a number leaving the cabin at once.

They took the horse which had been ridden by Blaisdell, for the use of Laura. She was helped into the saddle, and the friends, with the captain prisoner, set out at once for Valley Forge, knowing that the others would follow on immediately. As they progressed, Laura said:

"I had a strange dream last night. It was of Osgood."

"What was your dream?" asked Blaisdell.

"That he was dying. I saw him, pale as the snow over which we are riding, and around him stood angry men. There was no pity on any face. I strove to reach his side. The crowd gave way, and I did so. But when I touched his hand, it was cold. He was dead."

"Let us hasten to the camp," said Blaisdell, in an excited manner.

"Wherefore?" asked Zeke. "What's up?"

"Because there has been a charge of treason against Osgood. If the accusation is proven, he will suffer death."

"Who made that charge?"

"General Howe."

"Not yourself, eh?"

"No."

"It is well you did not. For, if you escaped punishment by a regular court-martial, I would have torn your heart out of your breast, if you had done aught to harm Lieutenant Osgood, for he is as true and brave a man as ever lived."

"I believe you."

"Let us hasten," cried Laura. She urged forward her horse so rapidly, that it was impossible for those on foot to keep pace with her.

It was approaching the hour of evening. The sun was fast sinking in the west. The nearer the ardent girl came to the camp, the more excited she became, and the more rapidly she urged on her steed. Dinah had made the greatest effort to keep pace with her young mistress, but had not been able to do so.

The sun was, perhaps, an hour high, when Laura dashed into camp. The negress was half

a mile behind, and the others, who held Blaisdell, were perhaps another half-mile to the rear.

As the troops saw the approach of Laura, they welcomed her with a cheer, and one of the number said:

"Quick, Miss Laura, ride to the general's headquarters. You are just in time."

The night dragged slowly along for Osgood. No friend came near him. He was, as he felt, indeed alone.

Daylight came. The day crept on. Several times he heard voices without, speaking of his execution, and no one appeared to feel the least pity for his wretched condition.

An hour before sunset he was called for by the guard, and, emerging from his place of confinement, he saw the army drawn up in line, and beyond, the scaffold upon which he was to suffer. He glanced around. Each face was cold and stern—there was no hope—death was before him, and a death of the most ignominious character.

But he walked firmly forward.

Upon a sudden he heard a scream. He recognized the voice. He had barely time to turn before Laura sprung from her horse, and was received into his arms. The poor girl had comprehended the state of things at a glance, but why her lover was to suffer she could not tell. She clung to him with all the intensity of her soul, and begged for his life.

There were few who did not weep as they gazed upon the stricken girl; but it was for her that tears fell, and not for her lover.

"You must take your last farewell," said the officer in charge, in a kind voice. "We pity you, but the decision of the court must be carried out."

"Oh, no! He is not guilty of any crime!" shrieked Laura; "I know he is not!"

But the poor girl could do nothing. The prisoner was taken forward and mounted the scaffold, while Laura was borne apart, fainting.

The charge was read to the prisoner, and then the specifications, the letters, and the findings of the court. As the letter which was supposed to be from Osgood to General Howe was being

read, Dinah came up. She listened a moment, and then cried:

"Massa Cap'n Blaisdell wrote dat letter. I see'd 'em!"

"When?" asked the commander.

"Yes'erday, at missus's house. See—see—"

And Dinah produced the slips and the letter of Osgood, upon which the name of Blaisdell had been scribbled.

This produced an instant change in the matter. The words were the same, and the writing so different, being apparently an imitation, that the general asked:

"Are you sure that Osgood did not write this letter?"

"Sart'in shu'! De British soger captain—he did it all, for sure!"

"You saw it written?"

"Yah! An' dar comes de man dat done it. Ax 'em!"

Blaisdell now came up. The proof was so strong against him that denial was folly. He therefore confessed the authorship of all the correspondence produced before the court. This remarkable evidence at once so changed the aspect of affairs that Osgood was removed from the scaffold and surrounded by his friends.

"But how came you by the chart of our camp?" asked the general of Blaisdell.

"It was furnished by him!"

Blaisdell pointed to Johnson.

"By Johnson!" echoed a score of voices.

"By the one who calls himself Johnson, but he is no other than Captain Brown, of the British Army, as you will see if you remove his disguise."

This was indeed true, and the scaffold prepared for poor Osgood was used for that villain, and Blaisdell was returned under guard to Howe, to suffer the penalty of his crime by disgrace and expulsion from the army. He did not await the ordeal—being found dead by his own hand, in the guard-house, on the morning after his return—a pistol-shot having done its work.

Laura, Old Nancy's Ward, became the wife of Osgood, both living long and happily in the Quaker City.

THE END.

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